A Traitor in London

Fergus Hume

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A TRAITOR IN LONDON

BY

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"The Mystery of a Hansom Cab," "Hagar of the Pawn Shop,"

Etc., Etc.

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CHAPTER I.

CUPID IN LEADING STRINGS.

"It's an infernal shame!"

"I call it common sense!"

"Call it what you please, Malet. I deny your right to keep back my money."

"Right? Your father's will gives me every right. If I approve of your marriage, the money will be paid down on your wedding day."

"But you don't approve, confound you!"

"Certainly not. Brenda Scarse is not the wife for you, Harold."

"That's my business."

"Mine also—under the will. Come, come now; don't lose your temper."

The elder speaker smiled as he proffered this advice, knowing well that he was provoking his cousin beyond all bounds. Harold Burton was young, fiery-tempered, and in love. To be thwarted in his love was something more than exasperating to this impetuous lover. The irritating request that he should keep his temper caused him to lose it promptly; and for the next five

minutes Mr. Gilbert Malet was witness of a fine exhibition of unrestrained rage. He trembled for the furniture, almost for his own personal safety, though he managed to preserve a duly dignified outward calm. While Harold stamped about the room, his burly cousin posed before a fireless grate and trimmed his nails, and waited until the young man should have exhausted this wholly unnecessary display of violence.

They were in the library of Holt Manor. It was a sombre, monkish room; almost ascetic in its severity. Bookcases and furniture were of black oak, carpet and curtains of a deep red color; and windows of stained glass subdued the light suitably for study and meditation. But on this occasion the windows were open to the brilliant daylight of an August afternoon, and shafts of golden sunshine poured into the room. From the terrace stretching before the house, vast woods sloped toward Chippingholt village, where red-roofed houses clustered round a brawling stream, and rose again on the further side to sweep to the distant hills in unbroken masses of green. Manor and village took their Teutonic names from these forests, and buried in greenery, might have passed as the domain of the Sleeping Beauty. Her palace was undoubtedly girdled by just such a wood.

But this sylvan beauty did not appeal to the pair in the library. The stout, domineering owner of the Manor who trimmed his nails and smiled blandly had the stronger position of the two, and he knew it well —so well that he could afford to ignore the virile wrath of his ward. Strictly speaking, Captain Burton was not a ward, if that word implies minority. He was

thirty years of age, in a lancer regiment, and possessed of an income sufficient to emancipate him from the control of his cousin Gilbert. Still, though possible for one, his income was certainly not possible for two, and if Gilbert chose he could increase his capital by twenty thousand pounds. But the stumbling-block was the condition attached to the disposal of the money. Only if Malet approved of the prospective bride was he to part with the legacy. As such he did not approve of Brenda Scarse, so matters were at a standstill. Nor could Harold well see how he was to move them. Finding all his rage of no avail, he gradually subsided and had recourse to methods more pacific.

"Let me understand this matter clearly," he said, taking a seat with a resolute air. "Independent of my three hundred a year, you hold twenty thousand pounds of my money."

"To be correct," replied Malet in a genial tone, "I hold forty thousand pounds, to be equally shared between you and your brother Wilfred when you marry. The three hundred a year which you each possess I have nothing to do with."

"Well, I want to marry, and ——"

"You do—against my wishes. If I do not approve of your choice I need not pay you this money. I can hold it until I die."

"And then?" asked Harold, sharply.

Gilbert shrugged his burly shoulders. "Then it goes to you and Wilfred direct. There is no provision made for my handing it over to another trustee. You are bound to get your share in the long run;

but I am not thinking of dying just yet, my dear Harold."

"I can't imagine what possessed my father ever to make so foolish a will."

"Your father was guided by experience, my boy. He made a miserable marriage himself, and did not want you or Wilfred to go and do likewise. He had evidently confidence in my judgment, and knew that I would stand between you and folly."

"Confound your impudence," shouted Harold, his dark face crimson with anger. "You're only fifteen years older than I am. At the age of thirty I am surely capable of selecting my own wife!"

"I hardly think so, when you select Miss Scarse!"

"What the deuce have you against her?"

"Nothing, personally. She is a nice girl, a very nice girl, but poor. A man of your extravagant tastes should marry money. Brenda is well enough, for herself," continued Malet, with odious familiarity, for which Harold could have struck him, "but her father! —Stuart Scarse is a Little Englander!"

Captain Burton was taken aback at the irrelevancy of this remark. "What the devil has that to do with her or me?" he demanded bluntly.

"Everything, if you love your country. You belong to a Conservative family. You are a soldier, and the time is coming when we must all rally round the flag and preserve the Empire. Scarse is a member of that pernicious band which desires the dismemberment of our glorious ——"

"Oh, I'm sick of this!" Harold jumped up and crammed on his cap. "Your political ideas have

nothing to do with my marriage. You have no reason to object to Miss Scarse. Once for all, will you pay me this money?"

"No, I will not. I shall not agree to your marrying the daughter of a Little Englander."

"Then I shall throw the estate into Chancery."

Malet looked uneasy, but sneered. "By all means, if you want the whole forty thousand to go to fee the lawyers! But, before you risk losing your money, let me advise you to make sure of Miss Brenda Scarse!"

"What do you mean?"

"Ask Mr. van Zwieten, who is staying with her father."

"Oh!" said Harold, contemptuously, "Brenda has told me all about him. Her father wants her to marry him, and it is true he is in love with her; but Brenda loves me, and will never consent to become the wife of that Boer!"

"Van Zwieten is no Boer. He is a Dutchman, born in Amsterdam."

"And a friend of yours," sneered Captain Burton.

"He is no friend of mine!" shouted Malet, somewhat ruffled. "I detest the man as much as I do Scarse. If ——"

"Look here, Gilbert, I don't want any more of this. I trust Brenda, and I intend to marry her."

"Very good. Then you'll have to starve on your three hundred a year."

"You refuse to give me the money?"

"Absolutely."

"Then I'm glad I don't live under your roof and can tell you what I think of you. You are a mean

hound, Malet—keep back, or I'll knock you down. Yes, a mean hound! This is not your real reason for refusing to pay me this money. I'll go up to town to-day and have your trusteeship inquired into."

Gilbert changed color and looked dangerous. "You can act as you please, Harold; but recollect that my powers are very clearly defined under the will. I am not accountable to you or to Wilfred or to any one else for the money. I have no need to defend my honor."

"That we shall see." Harold opened the door and looked back. "This is the last time I shall enter your house. You meddle with my private affairs, you keep back money rightfully belonging to me on the most frivolous pretext, and, in fact, make yourself objectionable in every way; but, I warn you, the law will force you to alter your behavior."

"The law cannot touch me!" cried Gilbert, furiously. "I can account for the money and pay it when it should be paid. Out of my house——!"

"I am going—and, see here, Gilbert Malet, if the law affords me no redress, I shall take it into my own hands. Yes, you may well turn pale. I'll make it hot for you—you swindler!" and Captain Burton, banging the door, marched out of the house, furious at his helpless position.

Left alone, Malet wiped his bald forehead and sank into a chair. "Pooh!" he muttered, striving to reassure himself. "He can do nothing. I am his cousin. My honor is his honor. I'm in pretty deep water, but I'll get ashore yet. There's only one way —only one!" Then Mr. Malet proceeded to cogitate

upon that one and only way, and the obstacles which prevented his taking it. His thoughts for the next half hour did not make for peace of mind altogether.

Meanwhile, Captain Burton, fuming with rage, strode on through the green woods to the lady of his love. They had arranged to meet and discuss the result of this interview. As Mr. Scarse did not approve of his attentions toward his daughter, the cottage where she dwelt was forbidden ground to Harold. He was compelled, therefore, to meet her by stealth in the woods. But the glorious summer day made that no hardship. He knew the precise spot where Brenda would be waiting for him—under an ancient oak, which had seen many generations of lovers—and he increased his pace that he might the sooner unburden to her his mind. As he left the park and made his way through the orchards which surrounded Chippingholt, he saw Mr. Scarse no great distance away.

"That's a queer get-up the old man's got on," muttered Harold, perplexed at the wholly unusual combination of a snuff-colored greatcoat and a huge black scarf. "Never saw him in that rig before. I wonder what it means!"

As he came up within a dozen paces of the thin, white-haired figure, he was more than ever puzzled, for he noticed that the black scarf was of crape—there must have been several yards of it wound round the old man's neck. It was undoubtedly Mr. Scarse. There was no mistaking that clean-shaven, parchment-like visage. Burton took off his cap in greeting, but did not speak. He knew the old man was not well disposed toward him. Mr. Scarse looked blankly at

him and pressed on without sign of recognition; and even though he had half expected it, Captain Burton felt mortified at this cut direct.

"Brenda and I will have to marry without his consent," he thought; "never mind!"

But he did mind. To marry a girl in the face of parental opposition was all against his inclinations. The future looked dismal enough to him at the moment, and his spirits were only further depressed as the sky began to blacken over with portentous clouds. Impressionable as he was, this endorsement of nature was full of meaning for him in his then pessimistic frame of mind. The sunshine faded to a cold grey, the leaves overhead shivered, and seemed to wither at the breath of the chill wind; and when he caught sight of Brenda's white dress under the oak, her figure looked lonely and forlorn. The darkling sky, the bitter wind, the stealthy meeting, the solitary figure—all these things struck at his heart, and it was a pale and silent lover who kissed his sweetheart under the ancient tree. His melancholy communicated itself to Brenda.

"Bad news, dear—you have bad news," she murmured, looking into his downcast face. "I can see it in your eyes."

They sat silent on the rustic seat. The birds had ceased to sing, the sun to shine, and the summer breeze was cold—cold as their hearts and hands in that moment of sadness.

They were a handsome couple. The man tall, thin-flanked, and soldiery of bearing; dark eyes, dark hair, dark moustache, and a clean-cut, bronzed face, alert, vivacious, and full of intelligence. Brenda was

a stately blonde, golden-haired, blue-eyed, and passionate as one of those stormy queens of the Nibelungen Lied, to whom love, insistent and impassioned, was as the breath of life. Both were filled with the exuberant vitality of youth, fit to overcome all obstacles, greatly daring and resolutely courageous. Yet, seated there, hand in hand, they were full of despondency—even to cowardice. Brenda felt that was so, and made an effort to rouse herself and him.

"Come, dear," she said, kissing her lover, "the sun will shine again. Things can't be so bad as to be past mending. He has refused?"

"Absolutely. He won't give me the money."

"On the ground that he does not approve of me!"

Harold nodded. "He tried to make out that you were in love with Van Zwieten!"

"Oh! he is so ready to stoop to any meanness," said Brenda, scornfully. "I always disliked Mr. Malet. Perhaps my dislike is hereditary, for my father detests him."

"On political grounds?"

"Of course. But those are strongest of all grounds for hatred. Religion and politics have caused more trouble and more wars than—" she broke off suddenly. "Of course you don't believe this about Mr. van Zwieten."

"Need you ask?" said Burton, tenderly. "The fellow is staying with you still?"

"Yes. He has been here for the last two days talking politics with father, and worrying me. Thank goodness, he goes to-morrow!"

"Glad of it," growled Burton. "He is the Beast

mentioned in Revelation. By the way, Brenda, who is Van Zwieten?"

Miss Scarse looked puzzled. "A friend of my father's."

"Yes; but what is his position—where does he come from—how does he make his income? There is something mysterious about the fellow."

"He comes from Holland—he is a friend of Dr. Leyds—and he is shortly going out to fill some post under the Transvaal Government. That's all I know about him."

"He seems to have plenty of money."

"Yes, he spends a good deal, to judge from what I saw of him in town last season. Then he is a popular cricketer, you know."

"I know. But the idea of a foreigner playing cricket!"

"Well, Mr. van Zwieten does, and very well too. You must have seen about his play in the papers. He is a great man at Lord's."

"All the same, he is a mystery; and he is too much mixed up with the Boers to please me. If there is a war, I hope he'll be with them that I may have a shy at him."

Brenda laughed, and pressed her lover's arm. "You silly boy, you are jealous."

"I am, I am. Who wouldn't be jealous of you? But this is not war, Brenda dear. Let us talk about ourselves. I can't get this twenty thousand pounds until Malet dies. I see nothing for it but to marry on my three hundred a year. I dare say we'll scrape along somehow."

"I have two hundred a year of my own," cried Brenda, vivaciously; "that makes ten pounds a week. We can easily manage on that, dear."

"But your father?"

"Oh, he wants me to marry Mr. van Zwieten, of course," said she, with great scorn. "So I must just do without his consent, that's all. It sounds wrong, Harold, doesn't it? But my father has never done his duty by me. Like most men who serve the public, he has sacrificed his all to that. I was left to bring myself up as best I could; and so I think I have the right to dispose of myself. My father is nothing to me—you are everything."

"Dearest!" He kissed her. "Then let us marry—but no—" he broke off abruptly. "If war should break out in South Africa I would have to leave you!"

"But I wouldn't be left," said Brenda, merrily. "I would go out with you—yes, to the front!"

"I'm afraid you couldn't do that."

"I could and I would. I would go officially as a nurse. But, Harold, why don't you see your lawyer about this money? He may find means to force Mr. Malet to pay it to you."

"I intend to see him to-morrow, dearest. I am going up to town by the six train this evening, though I confess I don't like leaving you with this Van Zwieten."

"I think I can undertake to keep Mr. van Zwieten at his distance," said Brenda, quietly, "even though my father encourages him."

"I believe your father hates me," said Harold, gloomily. "He cut me just now."

"Cut you, dear; what do you mean?"

"Just what I say, Brenda. I met you father, and he cut me dead."

She stared at her lover in amazement. "You can't possibly have seen my father," she said decisively. "He is ill with influenza, and hasn't left his room for two days!"

CHAPTER II.

A SHOT IN THE DARKNESS.

AFTER many and fervent farewells, the lovers embraced and went home. It was understood that Harold should go to London that evening by the five o'clock local from Chippingholt, which connected with the express at Langton Junction, some twenty miles away. After seeing his lawyer, he was to write her a full account of the interview, and arrange definitely the details for their marriage. Meanwhile, to set his mind at rest, Brenda promised to see as little of Van Zwieten as possible.

As her father was ill, she was compelled to play the part of hostess—an ungrateful one enough toward a guest she so disliked — but as the Dutchman had arranged to leave next morning, she hoped for so short a time to obey the laws of hospitality, and at the same time keep him at his distance. But even so the situation was a trying one, and Brenda relished it little.

The cottage was an unpretentious little place on the borders of Chippingholt, where the orchards began to stretch toward the woods. Scarse was not well off, and had been fortunate enough to obtain it at quite a nominal rental. He kept a cook and one housemaid, both of whom Brenda looked after; and despite his slender means, his style of living was in

every way refined. The largest room in the house had been turned into a study, and here Brenda now found her father buried in blue-books, pamphlets and newspapers.

Scarse was a lean, tall anæmic-looking creature. His hair was quite white, his pallid and wrinkled face clean-shaven, and his whole aspect was one of peevishness and querulousness. In spite of the warmth he had ordered a fire to be lighted, and, wrapped in a llama wool dressing-gown, he crouched over it with the *Daily Mail* spread out upon his knees. He looked ill and cross, and seemed terribly feeble. Brenda was more than ever certain, now that she saw him, that Harold had been mistaken in thinking it was he whom he had met. He looked, she thought, more fit for bed than for walking.

"Come in, come in," he said in his thin, cantankerous voice. "Shut the door, Brenda; there is quite a draught."

"Are you no better, father?" she asked, coming toward him and taking his hand. Scarse snatched it away.

"Not a bit, my dear. This thing has a hold of me —I am aching all over. Of course it comes just to prevent my speaking at the Trafalgar Square meeting next week!"

"You can send an excuse."

"I can't and I won't," snapped her father. "This paper shows me how necessary it is for all men to protest against this unjust war, which has been forced upon the Boers. I must speak in favor of that honest, God-fearing band of farmers, who are in dan-

ger of being crushed by a capitalist war. I want to see Van Zwieten about this article. It is perfectly scandalous. Where is he?"

"I don't know. I've not seen him all the afternoon."

"Is that the way you attend to your guests?"

"He is no guest of mine," cried Brenda, indignantly. "I can't bear the man. His mere presence is most objectionable to me."

"You are a foolish, strong-headed girl, Brenda. Van Zwieten wants to marry you, as I have told you, and he is ——"

"I won't marry him. I detest the man."

"And you fancy you are in love with that scamp of a Burton?" said Scarse, frowning.

"Harold is not a scamp, father. He is noble and honest, and everything that is good. I will marry no one but him."

"I shall never give my consent—never!"

"Then I must do without it," replied Brenda, determinedly. "I do not want to behave otherwise than as a daughter should, father, but I love Harold, and I hate Van Zwieten."

"Don't be silly," said the M. P., querulously. "Van Zwieten is well off. He is a good match for you. He can give you a good position."

"In the Transvaal, I suppose," scoffed Brenda.

"Yes. And where could you live better than in a new land, where the vices of civilization have not penetrated! I don't speak of Johannesberg, that sink of iniquity, but of Pretoria, and of those towns where the Boer element exists pure and simple. With your

husband in the Government you can help him to build up an ideal state."

"I don't want to build up anything. Harold and I can be happy by ourselves."

"You shall never marry the scamp, I tell you," cried Scarse, angrily. "Let alone his character, which is bad, he is the cousin of that scoundrel Malet, who is a bigoted Imperialist—one who is doing his best to ruin this country by advocating annexation of all and everything. He is one of those who are urging on this war. I hate the man."

"Only because you differ from him in politics."

"No, on other grounds which do not concern you. I know Malet—none better—and I would gladly see him dead."

"Father!" Brenda was amazed at the savage energy of the old man. "What has Mr. Malet done to you that you should hate him so?"

"Never mind! I hate him and I hate that young Burton."

"Well, father," said Brenda, quietly, "you need not have shown it quite so plainly to-day. Harold said you met him this afternoon and cut him." This was a tentative remark, as Brenda was certain her father could not have been out.

"Met Burton!" said he, raising himself angrily. "What do you mean, child?"

"Were you not out to-day?"

"No, I have not left this room."

"But Harold said he saw you with a snuff-colored coat and a crape scarf round your throat. Father!" Brenda shrieked, "what is it?"

She might well ask. Scarse was always pale, but now he was deathly white. He reared himself out of his chair with a look of terror in his eyes. It was in broken sentences he spoke. "Did . . . Harold Burton . . . see me . . . with a crape scarf . . . to-day?"

"Yes, yes; but was it you, father? Why did you wear ——"

"Hush! Say no more, Brenda. Go away."

A faint color was coming back to his face, and he began to look more like himself, less like a corpse. Brenda was about to demur at leaving him, but he stopped her with a peremptory gesture. "Go away, Brenda, I say."

"But won't you explain ——"

"There is nothing to explain; go away."

She was obliged to obey, and reluctantly she left the room. She could not understand her father's emotion, nor could she understand the presence in Chippingholt of this man with the crape scarf, who so nearly resembled him as to be mistaken for him by Harold. So far as she knew her father had no relatives. But he had always been very reticent about his family affairs. She knew nothing of his connections or his past life. Her mother she could scarce remember. She had died when Brenda was a tiny child, and ever since that time she had been brought up by strangers far away from home. Up to the age of twenty she had been at a boarding-school, and there she had seen next to nothing of her father. A casual visit on his part, and a few casual questions as to her welfare—her mental welfare chiefly—that represented Brenda's ex-

perience of the domestic affections and a father's love. When she had come of age Scarse had sent for her, and had established her in the cottage at Chippingholt, giving her occasionally a week in London during the season. He retained his bachelor chambers in Start Street, Piccadilly, but never took her there, and ever kept her at arm's length when she hungered for sympathy and love. No wonder, then, that in the all-important matter of her marriage she felt no inclination to obey the man who had been to her but a father in name: and no wonder she had fallen in love with Harold Burton, and was bent now on linking her life with his. He was the one human being who had held out to her affection and sympathy, and from him she determined no earthly power should part her. Her father treated her as a pawn on the chessboard of life, to be moved about as best suited his own purpose. She regarded herself as a human being, with the right to consider her own happiness, and to work out her own destiny.

"Never will I marry Van Zwieten," she reiterated to herself as she dressed for dinner. "The man is a tyrant and a brute. Father has done nothing for me that I should sacrifice myself so for him. Together Harold and I will shape a new life for ourselves. If father's neglect has done nothing else for me, it has at least made me self-reliant."

As she expected, her father did not appear at dinner, alleging his megrims as the reason for his non-appearance. But Brenda had a very shrewd idea that the appearance of this unknown man, who so resembled him, had more to do with it. She felt sure there was

some sort of mystery. Her father's life was altogether so secretive. But she did not let it disturb her, and dismissed it from her mind, until a chance remark from Van Zwieten again roused her curiosity.

The Dutchman was tall of stature—well over six feet, and stout in proportion. A well set-up figure assuredly, and what would be termed a fine animal. His hair and beard were of an ochre color, and his sleepy blue eyes, although seeming to observe nothing, on the contrary took in everything. His complexion was delicate as a woman's, and he was slow and soft of speech and movement. A casual observer might have set him down as lethargic and small-brained. But Brenda knew that he possessed a fund of energy and cunning and dogged determination which could be exerted to the detriment of those whom his sleepy looks deceived. Those blue eyes could sparkle with fire, that soft, low voice could ring out like a trumpet, and that huge frame could be active and supple as any serpent. Waldo van Zwieten he was called, and he had lived in London now for the past five years.

He spoke three or four languages, especially English, with wonderful purity and fluency. He appeared to have plenty of money, and for the most part devoted himself to cricket as an exhilarating pastime for an idle man. In the capacity of a crack batsman he was highly popular. No one deemed him anything but a lazy foreigner—good-natured, and loving England and the English sufficiently well to become an English subject in all but an official sense. But he had never taken out letters of naturalization.

He was correctly attired now in evening dress, and

took his seat at the table in his usual sleepy fashion. His blue eyes rested with a look of admiration on Brenda, whose blonde beauty was more dazzling than ever in her dinner dress of black gauze and silk. She apologized for her father's absence, and winced at Van Zwieten's compliments.

"You leave me nothing to desire, Miss Scarse," said he. "I could wish for no more delightful position than this."

"Please don't," replied Brenda, annoyed. "I'm sure you would rather talk politics to my father than nonsense to me."

"I never talk nonsense to any one, Miss Scarse; least of all to you. Thank you, I will take claret. By the way, it was rather unwise of Mr. Scarse to go out to-day with this cold upon him."

"He was not out to-day."

"Indeed, I think so. I saw him and spoke to him."

"You spoke to him? Had he a snuff-colored coat and a crape scarf on?"

"No; he was dressed as usual in his tweed suit."

Brenda looked at him sceptically. Her father had denied being out. Yet this man said he had actually spoken with him, but according to him he was not dressed like the man Harold had described. Could two men be so much alike? And why had her father been so moved when she had related Harold's experience?

"Are you sure it was my father you spoke to?" she asked, after a pause.

Van Zwieten flashed a keen glance at her puzzled face, and was evidently as puzzled himself. "I am

certain it was Mr. Scarse," he said quietly. "I had no reason to think otherwise. Why do you doubt my word?"

"My father denies having been out."

"In that case I should have said nothing. Mr. Scarse evidently has some reason for his denial. But cannot we select a more pleasant subject of conversation?"

"Such as what?" demanded Brenda, wondering at this sudden change.

"Yourself or Captain Burton. I saw him to-day."

"That is very likely," she replied, quietly divining Van Zwieten's intention. "Captain Burton is staying at the 'Chequers Inn.' At least he *was* staying there, but he left for London at five."

"Oh, indeed! He must have changed his mind then, for it was after six when I saw him."

"I suppose he is privileged to change his mind," said Brenda. All the same she was puzzled to account for Harold's remaining at Chippingholt.

Thwarted in this direction, Van Zwieten tried another. He was bent on making Brenda confess an interest in Burton, so as to lead up to an explanation of his own feelings. "It is strange," said he, slowly, "that Captain Burton does not stay at the Manor."

"Why do you think it strange, Mr. van Zwieten?"

"Ach! is it not strange? His brother Wilfred stays there—he is there now. Mr. Malet is Captain Burton's cousin, and he is hospitable—not to me," added he, with a sleepy smile; "Mr. Malet does not like me."

Brenda ignored this last remark. "If you ask Captain Burton for his reasons I have no doubt he will gratify your curiosity," she said coldly.

"Oh, I do not care; it is nothing to me." Van Zwieten paused, then resumed very deliberately, "I do not like Captain Burton."

"Really! The loss is his."

"I do not like Captain Burton," repeated Van Zwieten, "because he likes you."

"What has that to do with me?" asked Brenda, injudiciously.

"Everything. I love you—I want to marry you!"

"You told me all about that, Mr. van Zwieten, and I told you I was unable to marry you. It was agreed that we should drop the subject."

"Captain Burton loves you and wants to marry you," pursued the big man, doggedly, "and so I do not like Captain Burton."

The situation was becoming embarrassing, but the man was evidently acting and speaking with a set purpose. "Please say no more, Mr. van Zwieten," said Brenda, trying to control her temper. Still he went on resolutely.

"When we are married we will see nothing of Captain Burton."

"That will never be. I shall never marry you."

"Oh, yes; your father is willing."

"But I am not." Brenda rose with a glance of anger. "How dare you take advantage of my father's absence to insult me?"

"I do not insult you," went on the Dutchman, with a quiet smile. "One does not insult one's future wife."

"I would rather die than marry you!" She walked to the door. "You have no right to speak to me like

this. I refuse to see you again, and I shall tell my father of your behavior."

She swept out of the room in a fury, feeling herself helpless in the face of the man's persistency. Her departure, however, did not ruffle him in the least. He went on eating and smiling as though the interview had ended entirely to his satisfaction. After a good meal he lighted a cigar and went along to Mr. Scarse's study. The door was locked. He knocked, but there was no answer.

Van Zwieten was puzzled. There were matters connected with Mr. Scarse which he did not understand, and which he wished very much to understand. After pondering for a few moments, he put on a great-coat, in spite of the warmth of the night, a smasher hat of the Boer style, and stepped out by the front door. Thence he passed round to the French windows which lighted the study. The blinds were down, and the yellow lamplight shone through them from within. Van Zwieten tried the catch of one window. It yielded, and he slipped into the room. The lamp, fully turned up, was on the table; some papers were spread out on the blotting-pad on the desk, but there was no one in the room. He glanced at the papers, but could gather nothing from them to account for the absence of Scarse. He reflected, and recollected what Brenda had said.

"A snuff-colored coat; a crape scarf!" he mused. "So!" Then he left the room, closed the window after him, and vanished stealthily as a cat into the blackness of the night.

Meanwhile Brenda had gone to her room furious

with Van Zwieten and her father—with the former because he would persist in his attentions, with the latter because he exposed her to their annoyance. Not knowing that the Dutchman had gone out, she decided to remain upstairs, so as to avoid meeting him in the drawing-room. But her bedroom was so small, the night so hot, and she felt so restless, that eventually she decided to go up to Holt Manor and see Lady Jenny.

Gilbert's wife was a pretty, frivolous woman, with a good heart, a long tongue, and an infinite capacity for wasting money. Malet was devoted to her, and it was common talk that she could twist him round her finger. If she interested herself in the matter there might be a chance still of Harold's getting the money. Lady Jenny always declared, in her exaggerated way, that Brenda was the sweetest girl in the world, so, putting on her hat and cloak, Brenda determined to learn whether Lady Jenny really was her friend or merely a society acquaintance.

The night was moonless, hot, and almost without air. What the Scotch call uncanny. All day clouds had been rolling up from the south, and now the sky was an immense mass of bluish-black vapor hanging low over the dry and gasping earth. No breath of wind, no sound of life, human or animal. The earth lay dumb under that tent of gloom. Brenda felt stifled as she took the short way through the orchards. Knowing every inch of the ground, she made no mistake, and was occasionally aided by a vivid flash of lightning, which ran in sheets of sudden flame from east to west.

With her nimble feet and her knowledge of all the short cuts, it took her only twenty minutes to arrive at the Manor. She noted the time—nine o'clock—for the village chimes rang out as she halted at the porch of the great house. Here she was doomed to disappointment, for Lady Jenny—as the servant informed her—had gone to the Rectory with Mr. Wilfred Burton.

"Mr. Malet went out for a stroll too, miss," said the butler, who knew her very well; "but any message——"

"Oh, no message, Roberts," said Brenda, hurriedly; "that is—I will call on Lady Jenny to-morrow. Good-night."

"Won't you have an umbrella, miss? It looks stormy."

"No, thank you; I shall no doubt reach home before the storm breaks. Good-night."

But she was wrong in thinking so. Hardly had she left the park gates when the storm came. A blue zig-zag flared across the dark sky, there was a crash of thunder, and on the wings of a bitterly cold wind came the rain. The storm was tropical in its suddenness and fury. The wind struck Brenda like a solid mass, and she had to grasp the trunk of an apple-tree near by to keep her feet. With a hiss and a shriek the rain shot down—one deluge of water, as though the windows of heaven were opened as in the days of Noah's flood. A furious wind tore at the tree-tops, rending boughs, clashing the branches together, and sending a myriad leaves flying abroad like swarms of bees. The drenching rain spattered and drummed on

the woods, and in the open was driven in slanting masses of water by the force of the blast. Anxious to get under shelter, and terrified by the fierce lightning, Brenda kilted up her skirts and ran blindly through the trees at the risk of breaking her head. Her feet squelched in the soaking grass, and she was shaken and driven like a leaf by the furious gusts. Still on she stumbled in a dazed condition. It was a witch storm, and the powers of hell rode on the flying clouds.

Suddenly her foot tripped, and she fell full length on the grass, which was more like a morass. As she struggled to her knees the heavens overhead broke out in one dazzling sheet of flame, which for the moment threw a noonday light on the scene. There, under a tree, but a short distance away, Brenda saw a tall, dark, bulky figure standing. Hardly had the darkness shut down again when she heard a startled cry. Then a shot rang out with terrible distinctness, and then again the roaring of the tempest. Hardly knowing what she was doing, Brenda got on her feet, shaking and terrified. She ran forward. A second flare of lightning lighted the orchards with hell-fire, livid and blue. Almost at her feet she saw the body of a man. There came another deafening crash of thunder, and she staggered. A moment later and she lay senseless across the body of the unknown man shot in the darkness by an unknown hand.

CHAPTER III.

THE NAME OF THE VICTIM.

THE cook at Mr. Scarse's cottage was in a great state of alarm. She did not mind an ordinary tempest of respectable English character coming at its due and proper season. But this gale, at the close of a quiet summer day, arriving with so little warning and raging with such fury, had frightened her beyond measure. As a precautionary measure against the frequent lightning, she concealed the knives, covered up all the mirrors and reflective surfaces generally, and threw the fire-irons into the garden. Having thus safeguarded the cottage against the bolts of heaven, Mrs. Daw—so she was called—insisted that the housemaid, a whimpering orphan of meagre intelligence, should go round the house with her to see if any one or anything had been struck. They found dining-room, drawing-room and bedrooms deserted, and the door of their master's study locked.

"Lor'!" said Mrs. Daw, her fat face ashen pale, "an' 'e may be lyin' a corp in there, poor dear!"

"Oh, no, he ain't," responded the shaking housemaid; "I 'ear voices. Jus' put your eye to the keyhole, cook."

But the cook's valor did not extend thus far. She also heard the murmur of voices, and, thinking her master and his friend the Dutchman were within,

knocked at the door to bring them out for company. "We may as well go to 'eaven in a 'eap," said Mrs. Daw, knocking steadily like a woodpecker.

The door opened so suddenly that the two women recoiled with shrieks against the wall of the passage. Scarse, looking pale and upset, stepped out and closed the door after him. Judging him by themselves, they attributed his scared appearance to fright at the storm, and were ready to receive any amount of sympathy. But it soon appeared that their master had none to give them.

"What's all this? Why are you here?" he demanded, angry and suspicious.

"It's the storm, sir," whimpered Mrs. Daw, holding on to the housemaid. "I'm that feared as never was. Miss Brenda's hout, sir, and Mr. van Zwieten's with you, and me an' Tilda's a-shakin' like jelly."

"Miss Brenda out!" repeated Scarse, starting. "Oh, yes, I recollect she said something about going to the Rectory." This was untrue, but he seemed to think it necessary to make some excuse even to the servants. "I dare say Miss Brenda has been storm-bound there, and, as you say, Mr. van Zwieten is with me. There is nothing to be afraid of. Go back to the kitchen."

"The 'ouse may be struck, sir!"

"The house won't be struck," said Scarse, impatiently. "Don't be a fool. It is almost ten o'clock—go to bed;" and stepping back into the study, he closed and locked the door. Cook and housemaid tottered back to the kitchen.

"I'll give notice to-morrer," wailed the former. "It ain't right for two lone women to be without a manly

arm. If 'e only kep' a footman or a coachman it 'ud be a 'elp. 'And me the Church Service, Tilda, an' we'll pray as we may not be took."

"Ow, ain't it orful!" yelped Tilda, as a fiercer blast than usual shook the cottage. "Turn up the Berryial Service, cook."

This request the cook hurriedly obeyed, and the two were soon cheerfully employed in drawing what comfort they could from this somewhat depressing selection. The clock struck ten, and so unstrung were their nerves that they simultaneously jumped and shrieked.

Tilda declared that the candle burned blue; that a coal in the form of a coffin had jumped out of the kitchen range; and meanwhile the storm raved and howled without, shaking the house, tearing at doors and windows as though twenty thousand demons were trying to force an entrance. In their terrified frame of mind Mrs. Daw and her factotum actually believed that such might be the case.

But they soon had further cause for alarm. The kitchen door was tried, but Mrs. Daw had locked it. Immediately there came a furious knocking, insistent and incessant. Tilda shrieked, and scrambled under the table. Mrs. Daw dropped the Church Service, and grasped the poker with a trembling hand. There was a crash of thunder which went grinding over the roof —then the battering at the door again.

"Quick! Quick! Let me in!" wailed a voice, thin, high-pitched and terrified.

"Don't, don't!" shrieked Tilda, grovelling under the table. "Oh, lor', wot a bad girl I 'ave been."

But Mrs. Daw, somewhat recovered from her terror, thought she recognized the voice, in spite of its accent of pain. "Yer's a fool, Tilda. It's Miss Brenda!" and she unlocked the door, still grasping the poker in case she should be mistaken. As the door flew open a wild blast tore into the kitchen, and Tilda shrieked again. Mrs. Daw, too, uttered an exclamation, for Brenda fell forward, flung into her arms. The girl was soaking wet, wild-eyed and white-faced with terror. She could hardly speak, and clung, choking and shaking, to the terrified cook. The door banged to with a crash.

"Murder! Help!" gasped Brenda, hoarsely. "Oh, my God! he is dead!"

"Dead! Murder!" shrieked Mrs. Daw, dropping the poker, and Tilda wailed in sympathetic chorus. "Lor', miss! Who's 'e?"

"I don't know—he is dead—shot—in the orchards," said Brenda, and fell down in a dead faint for the second time that night. Usually she was not given to such feminine weakness, but the terrors of the night had proved altogether too much for her.

Having something human to deal with, Mrs. Daw recovered her presence of mind and unloosened Brenda's cloak. "Poor dear! she's frightened out of her wits, an' no wonder. Tilda, tell 'er pa there's murders and faintings. Look sharp!"

Tilda crawled from under the table and across the floor. She raised herself with a sudden effort of will, and was soon hammering at the study door.

"Master—sir! 'Elp—murder—perlice! Oh, sir," as

Scarse came out hurriedly, "Miss Brenda's in the kitchen, an' there's murder!"

He seized her wrists with an ejaculation of alarm. "Who is murdered? Speak, girl!"

"I don't know. Miss Brenda sez as there's murder. Oh, lor', what will become of us!"

Scarse shook her so that her teeth chattered. "Go back to the kitchen," he said sternly. "I'll follow directly," and Tilda found herself hurled against the wall, with the study door closed and locked. Her surprise at such treatment overcame even her terror.

"Well, 'e is a father!" she gasped, and her wits being somewhat more agile now that she was less afraid, she flew to the dining-room and snatched the spirit-stand from the sideboard. With this she arrived in the kitchen and found Brenda regaining her senses.

"Ain't 'e comin'?" asked Mrs. Daw, slapping Brenda's hands violently as a restorative measure.

"In a minute. 'Ere, give 'er some brandy. Where's a glarss? Oh, a cup 'll do. Oh, ain't it all dreadful; just 'ear the wind!"

"Hold your tongue and lock the door," said Mrs. Daw, snatching the cup from Tilda. "Come, miss, try and drink this."

She forced the strong spirit down Brenda's throat. The girl gasped and coughed, then the color slowly mounted to her cheeks, and she raised her head feebly.

"What is it?" she asked faintly. Then she shuddered and covered her face. "Ah! the murder! Shot! —shot—oh, God, how terrible!"

"Don't you be afraid, miss; the doors are all locked, an' nothin' or no one can git in." Then a shriek from

Mrs. Daw followed a sudden clanging of the bell. "Whatever's that?"

"Front door," replied Tilda, casting a glance at the row of bells. "I'll answer; give 'er more brandy, cook."

As the housemaid left, Brenda moaned and struggled to her feet. "Oh, the terrible darkness—the body—his body—in the wet grass! Father! Where is my father?"

"'E's a comin', dearie," said Mrs. Daw, giving her more brandy. "Take another sup, dearie. Who is it as is murdered, miss?" she asked in a scared whisper.

"I don't know. I could not see—the darkness—I fell over the body. I saw nothing. Oh!" She started up with a shriek. "Oh, if it really should be Harold!" Then she was overcome with anguish, and Tilda darted back to the kitchen.

"Would you believe," cried she to Mrs. Daw, "it's the furriner! An' master said as 'e was in 'is study talkin' to 'im!"

"Lor', so 'e did!" said Mrs. Daw, awestruck at having detected her master in a lie. "And 'e was out all the time! What does Mr. van Zwieten say, Tilda?"

"Van Zwieten!" shrieked Brenda, who was clinging to the table. "Has he been out? Ah! he hated Harold—the dead man—oh!" her voice leaped an octave, "he has killed my Harold!"

"What!" shrieked the other woman in turn, and Mrs. Daw, throwing her apron over her head, began to scream with the full force of her lungs. Tilda joined in, losing all remnant of control, and Brenda sank in a

chair white-faced and silent. The conviction that Harold had been murdered stunned her.

At this moment there was heard the sound of footsteps coming rapidly nearer. Scarse, with an angry and terrified expression, appeared on the scene. Close behind him came Van Zwieten, who seemed, as ever, quite undisturbed and master of himself. Brenda caught sight of him, and darting forward, seized the man by the lapels of his coat. "Harold!" she cried, "you have killed my Harold!"

"Harold—Burton!" replied Scarse, aghast. "Is he dead?"

"Dead—murdered! Oh, I am certain of it. And you killed him. You! You!"

Van Zwieten said not a word, but remained perfectly calm. He saw that the girl was beside herself with terror and grief, that she knew not what she was saying or doing. Without a word he picked her up in his strong arms and carried her moaning and weeping into the drawing-room. Scarse rated Mrs. Daw and Tilda sharply for so losing their heads, and followed the Dutchman. But before leaving the kitchen he was careful to take with him the key of the back door. "No one leaves this house to-night," he said sharply; "I must inquire into this. Give me that spirit-stand. Now go to bed, you fools."

"Bed!" wailed Mrs. Daw, as her master left the room. "Lor', I'll never sleep again—not for weeks any'ow. I daren't lie alone. Oh, what an 'orful night. I'll give notice to-morrow, that for sure!"

"So'll I," squeaked Tilda. With this the two went shivering to a common couch, full of prayers and

terror, and prepared to die—if die they must—in company.

In the drawing-room Brenda was huddled up in a chair, terrified out of her wits. Van Zwieten, calm and masterful, stood before the fireplace with his big hands clasped loosely before him. His trousers were turned up, his boots were soaking, and there were raindrops in his curly hair. For the rest he was dry, and the storm had not made the slightest impress on his strong nerves. When Scarse entered he threw a steely and inquisitive glance at the old man, who winced and shrank back with an expression of fear on his face. Van Zwieten, ever on the alert for the signs of a guilty conscience, noted this with secret satisfaction.

"Now then, Brenda," said her father, recovering at last some of his presence of mind, "what is all this about? You say that Burton is dead—that Mr. van Zwieten killed him."

"Ah!" interposed the Dutchman, stroking his beard, "I should like to know how I managed that."

"You hated him!" cried Brenda, sitting up straight with a sudden access of vigor. "You told me so to-night at dinner!"

"Pardon me; I said I did not like Captain Burton. But as to hating him—" Van Zwieten shrugged his shoulders; "that is an extreme word to use. But even if I did hate him you can hardly deduce from that that I should kill him!"

"He was shot, shot in the orchards, not far from the Manor gates. You were out——"

"That is scant evidence to justify a charge of mur-

der," interposed Scarce, angrily. "You are unstrung and hysterical, Brenda. How did you come to be out yourself in such a storm?"

"I went to see Lady Jenny at the Manor, about—about Harold's money. She was not in, so I came back by the short cut through the orchards. A flash of lightning showed him to me there, standing under a tree. Then there was a shot and a cry, and I ran forward, and fell over his body."

"Whose body?"

"I don't know—at least, I think it was Harold's body. Mr. van Zwieten hated him."

"It may not be Harold at all," said her father, impatiently; "you are jumping to conclusions—the wildest conclusions, Brenda. Did you see his face?"

"No; how could I? It was dark."

"Then how on earth do you know it was Captain Burton?"

"I am not sure, of course; but I think so. Oh, father, do you think —— Oh, perhaps, after all, it may not have been Harold."

Scarse shook off her clinging hands. "I think you're a fool," he said sharply, "and this wild talk of Burton's being dead is pure imagination on your part."

"I hope so—oh, how I hope so!" and Brenda shivered.

Van Zwieten, who had been listening with a cynical smile on his face, burst into a laugh, at which Brenda looked angrily at him. "Excuse me, Miss Scarse," he said politely, "but it is my opinion no one is dead at all. The shot and cry were no doubt the outcome of

a thundercrash. You were upset by the storm, and it seemed to you like—what you say."

"But a man is dead," protested Brenda, rising. "In my anxiety for Harold I may have been mistaken in thinking it was he. Still, some one was shot—I fell over the body and fainted."

"The man may have fainted also," suggested her father.

"If I may make a suggestion," said Van Zwieten, with strong common sense, "we are all talking without any reasonable sort of basis. Before we assume that a crime has been committed, I would suggest that we go to the orchards and see if we can find the body."

"No, no," cried Scarse, shrinking back. "Impossible at this hour, and on such a night."

"The storm is dying away," said the Dutchman, derisively. "However, if you don't care to come, I can go myself."

"I will go with you," cried Brenda, springing to her feet.

"For you, Miss Scarse, I think it is hardly wise. You are very much upset. Had you not better go to bed?"

"I couldn't sleep with this on my mind. I must know if it is Harold or not. If it is, I am certain you shot him, and until I know the truth I don't let you out of my sight."

"Very good." Van Zwieten bowed and smiled. "Come, then, and guide me."

"Brenda, you can't go out now. I forbid you—it is not fit or proper."

"What do I care for propriety in such a case as this?" cried Brenda, in a passion. "Come with me then, father."

"No, I can't—I am too ill."

Van Zwieten cast an amused look at Scarse, and the old man winced again. He turned away and poured himself out a glass of brandy. Without taking any further notice of him, Brenda put on her wet cloak and left the room, followed almost immediately by the Dutchman. Van Zwieten had many questions to ask his host, for he knew a good deal, and guessed more; but this was not the time for cross-examination. It was imperative that the identity of the deceased should be ascertained, and Van Zwieten wished to be on the spot when the discovery was made. As he left the room he heard the glass in Scarse's trembling hand clink against the decanter, and the sound made him smile. He guessed the cause of such perturbation.

The rain had ceased for the moment, but the wind was still high, and dense black clouds hurtled across the sky. A pale moon showed herself every now and then from behind the flying wrack, and fitfully lighted the midnight darkness.

As she was with Van Zwieten, Brenda took a wide circle through the village street. There were many people about in spite of the bad weather—some with lanterns—but Brenda could not gather from the scraps of conversation she heard whether the report of the dead man lying in the orchards had got abroad.

In silence Van Zwieten strode along beside her, apparently indifferent to anything. His attitude irri-

tated the girl, and when the wind lulled for a moment she demanded sharply where he had been on that night.

"You will be surprised to hear, Miss Scarse, that I went to see Captain Burton."

"And why?" asked Brenda, taken aback by this answer—the last she had expected to hear.

"To warn him," replied Van Zwieten, coolly.

"Warn him—about what—against whom?"

"About my engagement to you—against myself."

"I am not engaged to you, but to him," said Brenda, almost with a cry of despair.

It seemed impossible to make this man understand how she hated him.

"I think you are engaged to me," said the Dutchman, deliberately. "You say no, but that is girl's talk. I am not to be beaten by a girl. I always get what I want, and I want you."

The wind rose again, and further conversation was impossible. Brenda walked on, praying for strength to escape this terrible man. She could not rid herself of the idea that the dead man was her own true lover. Van Zwieten might have seen him, as he said, might have quarreled with him and shot him. The fear chilled her heart, and when next the wind fell she again taxed Van Zwieten. "You killed him?" she cried.

"You will insist on that, but you are wrong. I never saw Captain Burton. He was not at the inn when I called."

"He had gone to town," said Brenda, breathless with joy.

"No, he had gone to the Rectory."

Brenda stopped short. Lady Jenny had gone to the Rectory also. Perhaps Harold had seen her, and had asked for her aid. While she was wondering if this might be so, there was a great shouting, and in the distance she saw the blaze of torches borne by many people. The wind made them flare furiously.

"Ach!" said Van Zwieten under his breath, "they know now."

In the high wind Brenda did not hear him. Guessing that the concourse meant the discovery of the body, she flew along the road like a lapwing. The procession was coming toward the Manor gates from the direction of the orchards. Some men were shouting, some women screaming, but the solid group surrounded by the red, smoking lights remained silent. Van Zwieten followed noiselessly, and reached the group almost as soon as Brenda.

"You see," he breathed in the girl's ear, "he is alive!"

Brenda gave a cry of joy and flung herself into the arms of the foremost man.

"Harold! Harold! Thank God you are safe!"

"Brenda! What are you doing here? Go back! go back!"

"No, no. Tell me who—who is dead. Who has been murdered?"

Seeing she knew so much, Harold signed to the men carrying the body to stop. They set down the gate on which it rested.

"Malet!" cried Brenda, as she recognized the features of the corpse. "It is Mr. Malet!"

CHAPTER IV.

A STRANGE PIECE OF EVIDENCE.

NEXT morning there was great excitement in Chippingholt. That a murder should have taken place in that peaceful hamlet was bad enough, but that the victim should be the lord of the Manor himself was terrible beyond words. The body was carried up to the house, and the rural constable, not feeling himself competent to deal with so unusual an incident, sent for instructions to the police station at Langton.

Toward midday an inspector and constables came over to investigate. The inspector proceeded at once to the Manor and interviewed Lady Jenny. Her coolness and powers of endurance in such trying circumstances amazed even this stolid official.

She was a small, slightly-built woman, with a sylph-like figure, dark blue eyes and dark hair. Her rose-leaf skin was wonderfully delicate of tint and texture, and she looked fragile enough to be blown away by a breath of wind. She was said to be both frivolous and emotional, a shallow creature, fond of nothing but pleasure and spending money. In this emergency every one expected her to relapse into hysteria, and to be quite incapable of any control over her feelings; but, to their surprise, she was all the opposite of this, and shed hardly a tear. She received the news of the death almost apathetically, directed

the body to be laid out in the bed which her husband had occupied when alive, and herself calmed the emotions of the household.

Indeed, Wilfred Burton was far more upset about the murder than was Lady Jenny. He expressed his amazement at her wonderful self-control. He was lying on the sofa in her morning-room when he spoke to her on the subject.

"Some one must manage things," said the brave little woman, "and I know well enough you're incapable, poor dear! Harold could be of use, I know, but I don't want him just now. When I do, I'll send for him."

"He was here this morning, Jenny."

"I know he was; I saw him before you were up. He told me about the finding of poor Gilbert's body."

"Who found it?"

"Branksom, the lodgekeeper. He was coming home from the village about ten last night, and took the short path through the orchards. He stumbled over a body in the dark, and lit a match to see who it was, thinking it was some drunken man. The match blew out, but he recognized Gilbert, and saw the blood on his face, so he ran back to give the alarm. Harold, who was at the 'Chequers,' heard of the murder, and came with a man to remove the body. In fact, he was the first to arrive, and he examined the corpse before the rest came up."

Wilfred, a pale-faced, delicate-looking young man, with large, dark eyes, and a hectic flush on his face, shuddered at the calmness with which Lady Jenny

went into these details. "I don't know how you can do it!" he gasped, putting his hand to his throat like a hysterical woman. "It is terrible. And I thought you were so fond of Gilbert."

"Yes, I *was* fond of him," said Lady Jenny, with emphasis, "but I learned something about him lately which rather checked my fondness."

"What?"

"Something that concerned our two selves only, Wilfred. Poor Gilbert! He is dead, so I suppose I must forgive him."

"I wonder who killed him?" said Wilfred.

"I wonder. Of course Gilbert made many enemies."

"Political enemies?"

"Yes, and private ones also. My dear Wilfred," said Lady Jenny, laying her hand on the young man's arm, "I wish to speak well of the dead, especially as the dead was my husband, but Gilbert was not a good man."

Wilfred looked at her doubtfully. "You speak as though you knew something."

"So I do; but that something has nothing to do with the murder. I have no more idea who killed him than you have."

This conversation was interrupted by a message from Inspector Woke asking to see Lady Jenny, so she left the room at once. Mr. Inspector, a fat, stolid little man, much flurried by the unusual responsibility resting on his shoulders, had already seen the doctor and those who had found the body. He set about opening up the matter in his own way.

"I have seen the doctor, my lady," he said, wiping his face and breathing hard. "He tells me the deceased must have been murdered at about half-past nine last night. The wound is on the right temple, and as the skin and hair are burned and blackened with gunpowder, the shot must have been fired at close quarters. Death must have come very speedily, my lady. We can find no bullet, as it passed right through the deceased's head, and no weapon, although we have searched the orchards. All the evidence, my lady, must be circumstantial. We must find out who had a grudge against the deceased, or who had an interest in his death."

Lady Jenny arranged the ruffles of crape round her neck—she was in mourning for her father, and had been for some weeks—and laughed coldly. She thought very little of this elaborate explanation, and less of the man who made it. The inspector she took to be a man of the smallest intelligence, and one wedded to the red-tapeism and stereotyped routine of criminal procedure as conducted by the police generally.

"Mr. Malet had many enemies," she said quietly. "He was a politician, and at one time—not so long ago—was connected with the War Office."

"Can you tell me the names of any who had a grudge against him, my lady?"

"No; he told me he had enemies, but gave no explanation. Nor did I seek any. But this is a circumscribed neighborhood, Mr. Woke, and not over-populated. If a stranger came down to murder my husband, we should have no difficulty in getting a description of him."

Woke pricked up his ears. "Does your ladyship, then, suspect some stranger?"

"It is only an idea of mine," replied Lady Jenny, coldly. "I have no reasonable grounds for making a definite assertion. Still, my husband was popular to a certain extent in Chippingholt, and I know no one, I can think of no person—likely to desire his death."

"It might have been a stranger," mused Woke. "Rural murders do not use revolvers as a rule, and if they did it would hardly be at such close quarters as this. Can you inform me of the movements of this household last night, my lady?"

"Certainly. We dined at seven as usual. The night was hot and airless before the storm, so my husband said he would go out for a walk. He put a light coat over his evening dress, and strolled through the park. It was after eight when he went out."

"He did not say where he was going?"

"No, merely remarked that he would like a breath of fresh air. That was the last I saw of him. After eight I received a message from Captain Burton asking if I could call and see him at the Rectory."

"Why did he not wait on your ladyship here?"

Lady Jenny changed color, and her hands became restless. "He was not on good terms with my husband. They quarrelled over some family matter, and Captain Burton refused to enter this house again."

"Oh!" said Woke, significantly. "And where was Captain Burton last night?"

"He stayed at the 'Chequers,' but, as of course I could not meet him at a public-house, he asked me to go to the Rectory. The rector is a mutual friend."

"Did you go?"

"I left shortly before nine o'clock with Mr. Wilfred Burton."

"Who is he, my lady?"

"My husband's cousin—Captain Burton's brother. He is staying at the Manor, and has been here for the last month."

"Oh!" grunted Woke again—it seemed to be his method of expressing satisfaction—"then Mr. Wilfred Burton was not on bad terms with the deceased?"

"No. They were excellent friends. Mr. Burton is rather nervous and delicate, and my husband was careful of his health. I asked Mr. Burton to go with me to the Rectory, and he agreed. We left this house shortly before nine o'clock. On the way Mr. Burton stumbled and twisted his ankle, so he returned to the house, and I went on alone. Before I got to the Rectory the storm burst, and it was so violent that I grew afraid. I was taking a path through the woods, and got under a tree for shelter. As I was nearer the Manor than the Rectory I determined to return, and explain to Captain Burton in the morning. It was ten o'clock when I got back, soaking and tired out. I was waiting a long time under the trees for the rain to go off, and so it was late when I returned. Then I went to bed, but was awakened about midnight by the news of my husband's murder."

"And Mr. Burton?"

"He did not get back until ten either—in fact, we arrived almost at the same time, for his foot became so painful that he could walk only with great difficulty. He also was caught in the storm."

"Oh!" said the inspector again, "I should like to see Mr. Burton."

"Certainly." Lady Jenny rose. "Is there anything else you would like to ask me?"

"Not at present, my lady. I will examine your household first."

As Wilfred's foot was sprained, the inspector was shown into the morning-room. It was a case of the mountain coming to Mahomet—Mr. Woke being a veritable mountain of official dignity.

He looked curiously at the pale young man lying on the sofa, and seeing he was in pain, examined him as gingerly as possible. Wilfred was quite ready to give an account of his movements, although he expressed some surprise that such information should be required.

"Surely you don't suspect me of complicity in this dastardly crime, Mr. Inspector?"

"Dear me, no, certainly not," replied the jovial Woke, rubbing his hands, "but I am examining the whole household. It is wonderful what evidence may be gathered by such means. Indeed, I have got some evidence already. It may bear on the case, or it may not."

"What is it?" asked Wilfred, listlessly, and winced as his foot gave a twinge.

"I'll tell you later, sir. First relate your movements, please, last night."

Young Burton gave an account coinciding with that of Lady Jenny. "My foot must have got twisted," he said, "for it grew very painful, and the ankle is a good deal swollen. Otherwise I should not have let

Lady Jenny go on alone; but she was anxious to see my brother and insisted on going. It was a few minutes past nine when she left me. I tried to walk, but could not. Then the rain came on, and I dragged myself under a tree. I got soaked through, and thinking I should probably catch a severe chill—I am not strong, Mr. Woke—I set my teeth to it and hobbled home. I found a stake, which I used as a crutch; but the pain was so great that I could only walk very slowly. No one was about who could help me—it was so late. I got home after ten, and the butler helped me in. Then I went to bed, and put cold water bandages on my foot. It is easier now."

"You should get the doctor to see it, Mr. Burton."

"The doctor has been too busy examining poor Malet's body," said Wilfred. "I shall see him soon."

"Have you any idea who murdered Mr. Malet, sir?"

"Great heavens, no! The whole case is a mystery to me."

"Mr. Malet had many enemies I believe."

"He said he had, but I think he spoke generally rather than of any particular person or persons. So far as I know he had no enemy who specially desired his death."

The inspector looked grave and a trifle ill at ease. "Mr. Burton," he said at length, "are you aware that your brother was on bad terms with Mr. Malet?"

"They were not friendly," admitted Wilfred, looking anxious. "There was a disagreement about my brother's marriage. But, come now, my brother hasn't anything to do with the affair?"

"Well," said Woke, pinching his chubby chin, "it's just this way, sir. I have been making inquiries, and I find that your brother and the deceased had a violent quarrel yesterday afternoon in this house."

"I know that, but a quarrel does not mean murder. Confound it, sir, I won't listen to your insinuations."

Mr. Woke went on coolly and deliberately. "I questioned Roberts, the butler," he said, "and the man admitted that Captain Burton had used threatening language."

"How did Roberts know?"

"He overheard Captain Burton at the open door of the library. He spoke loud enough for the whole house to hear, so Roberts says, but there happened to be nobody else about."

"Go on," cried Wilfred, flushed and impatient. "Let me hear what my brother said."

"He called Mr. Malet a swindler, and said he would make it hot for him."

Wilfred smiled derisively. "Really! And on such words, used in a moment of anger, you would accuse my brother of a brutal crime?"

"I don't accuse him, sir," retorted Woke, hotly; "but I should like an explanation of his words."

"I dare say he will furnish you with one." Wilfred forgot his sprained ankle now, and sat up filled with indignation. "And let me tell you, Mr. Woke," he went on, "the explanation will be such as to clear my brother wholly from all suspicion. He is the best fellow in the world, and I would as soon believe myself guilty of this thing as him. Suspect whom you please, but not my brother."

But the phlegmatic officer was quite unmoved by this outburst. "Natural enough," he said. "Oh, I don't blame you for standing up for the captain, sir; and I dare say, for that matter, he may be able to furnish an *alibi*, as he was at the Rectory waiting for her ladyship. All the same, I am bound to inquire further into this quarrel. I don't accuse him, mind"—Mr. Woke shook his forefinger—"but I can't help having my suspicions." He paused, and asked suddenly, "Who is Miss Scarse, sir?"

"The daughter of Mr. Scarse, M. P., and the lady to whom my brother is engaged to be married. Mr. Malet disapproved of the marriage. That was the reason he and Captain Burton quarrelled."

"Scarse—Scarse," repeated the inspector, rising. "I've heard of him. He's the gentleman that's always writing and talking tall about the Boers, isn't he?"

"I believe he is what is called a Little Englander."

"An unpopular part at present, Mr. Burton. I am an Imperialist myself. H'm! so Miss Scarse is engaged to Captain Burton, is she? She called here at nine last night and asked for Lady Jenny, Roberts tells me."

"Perhaps you'll accuse her of the murder next!" said Wilfred, contemptuously.

"I accuse no one as yet, sir. But I must have my facts quite clear, and I go to get them. Good-day, sir," and Mr. Woke departed to call in at "The Chequers," with Captain Burton still the central figure in his mind.

But Harold was not at the inn. Late in the morning he had called at the cottage to see Brenda, and discuss with her the very stirring events of the pre-

vious night. She received him in the drawing-room, and, thankful to find that he was alive and well, embraced him more than ever affectionately. The poor girl looked ill and pale, for all this trouble had shaken her nerves more than she cared to confess. And in truth Harold himself did not feel much better, although he showed it less markedly. Mr. Scarse being shut up as usual in his study, they had the room to themselves. Van Zwieten had gone out.

"I had no chance, dear, of speaking to you last night," said Harold. "Tell me how you came to hear about this murder?"

"Harold, dear, I saw it committed!"

The man turned pale. "You saw it committed?" he repeated. "Why, Brenda, who did it?"

"I don't know. I had gone to the Manor to see Lady Jenny. I thought she might be able to help you about this money; and on my way home I was caught in the storm. In a vivid flash of lightning I saw Mr. Malet sheltering under a tree. I did not know then that it was Mr. Malet. After that I heard a cry, and then a shot. I ran forward, and stumbled over the body. Then I fainted, I think, but as soon as I was able I made my way home. It was only when I met you that I knew that Mr. Malet was the victim. Oh, Harold, dearest, I thought all the time it was you!"

"What on earth put such an idea as that into your head?" he asked in amazement.

"I don't know. Van Zwieten had told me he hated you, and I am afraid of Van Zwieten. He told me he went to see you at the inn, and I thought you might have quarrelled, and——" She threw out her hands.

"Oh, dearest, it is only because you are so much to me, I suppose, that I thought it must be you. Oh, Harold, the thought nearly drove me mad."

"But why did Van Zwieten want to see me?"

"To insist that you should give me up."

"Give you up? Confound his Dutch impertinence!" said Harold, angrily.

"Dearest, I am afraid of that man," said Brenda, clinging to him. "Yes, terribly afraid. He will not leave me alone. He speaks as though he were perfectly certain I should have to marry him."

"In that case, the most effectual method of putting an end to his presumption will be for you to marry me, dear, and that at once. Remember the twenty thousand pounds comes to me now!"

"Harold!—the money is yours? But how?"

"Malet's control of the fund died with him. Now that he is dead, nothing can prevent my getting it. We can be married straight away, dear."

"We should have done that in any case, Harold. But now—— Oh, do let us go to London at once; for, until we are really married, I shall not be able to shake off my fear of this man. I know I sha'n't."

"Nonsense, Brenda! He can be nothing to you, Why, you told me you detested the man."

"So I do. I loathe him. But he is so determined and wicked, and so unscrupulous, that somehow I fear him, I——"

"Is he here now?"

"Yes; but I believe he goes this afternoon. He may meet us in London, Harold, and give us trouble there. Believe me, he is dangerous."

"Give me the legal right to protect you, Brenda," said Harold, "and you need not fear Van Zwieten. He is a brute. I don't know how your father can tolerate him."

"Simply because Mr. van Zwieten is going out to the Transvaal Government, and father has taken up the Boer cause."

"If Kruger goes on as he is doing, there won't be any Transvaal Government at all in a few months. Don't you bother about Van Zwieten, dear. As soon as poor Malet is buried I shall go up to London and see about the money."

"There will be an inquest, I suppose."

"Of course. The police are at the Manor now. I went over to offer my services to Jenny, but she did not want me, and sent out to say so. Poor little woman! I don't see how she's going to manage matters. I hope she'll have enough to live on."

"Why! I thought Mr. Malet was rich!"

"He was. But he spent money freely, and gambled a good deal." Harold looked uneasy. "I tell you what, Brenda, I sha'n't be easy in my mind until I know that my money and Wilfred's is safe. Malet had supreme control over it, and for all I know he may have made ducks and drakes with it."

"Well, if he has, we'll have to do without it, that's all," replied the girl. "By the way, dear, why didn't you go to town last night as we arranged?"

"I changed my mind. It struck me that Jenny might manage to succeed with Malet where I had failed. I didn't go up to the house, because I didn't want to meet him; so I sent her a note asking her to

come to the Rectory. You know Mr. Slocum is one of my oldest friends."

"How strange," said Brenda, wonderingly. "I had exactly the same idea; that was why I went to the Manor last night. When I got there they told me Lady Jenny had gone to the Rectory."

"I didn't see her," said Harold, grimly. "I waited till nine, and as she hadn't turned up then I went back to the inn. There, later on, I heard of the murder, and went to look at the body. Although we had quarrelled I felt sorry for the poor devil when I heard of his violent death."

"Poor Mr. Malet," sighed Brenda; "I wonder who killed him, and why?"

"Well, I can't say why, dear, but I have an idea who it was that shot him."

"Who? Who?"

"That man I mistook for your father."

Brenda turned pale, remembering her father's agitation.

"Impossible! Why do you think so?"

"I examined the body first, before the others came up. I found the right hand was clenched, and by the light of the lantern I opened it. It was grasping a scrap of crape!"

"A scrap of crape! But what has——" Brenda's voice died in her throat.

"Don't you remember my description? That old man wore a crape scarf!"

CHAPTER V.

VAN ZWIETEN SHOWS HIS TEETH.

THIS unexpected piece of evidence caused Brenda no little uneasiness. She reflected that the man with the crape scarf had so closely resembled her father as to be mistaken for him, and then she remembered how her father had refused to give any information concerning this double of his. There was also the fact of his avowed hatred of Malet. Do what she would, she could not rid herself of the idea that through this third person, so like himself, her father was in some way connected with the murder. And little as she loved him, the thought of it shocked and terrified her. She told Harold what had passed between them in the study, and unbosomed herself of her suspicions to him. In reply he asked her a few straightforward questions.

"Did your father refuse to speak of this man, Brenda?"

"Absolutely. He sent me out of the room."

"He was uneasy?"

"More than uneasy," said the girl, with emphasis; "he was terrified. There is great mystery in all this, Harold. In some way my father is connected with this man. For all I know, he may be a relative. I am very ignorant of my family history."

"H'm! Have you seen your father this morning?"

"No. He did not come to breakfast, and I did not go to his study, knowing that he dislikes to be disturbed."

"Well, we must go to his study now," said Harold, rising, "for I am sure that the man with the crape scarf killed Malet, and your father may be able to throw some light on the subject."

"Harold, you don't think my father——"

"Who can tell? Brenda, we must face the facts, and see him. In any case I am the only person who knows about this scrap of crape, and I shall keep the information to myself. Now, come along, dear, and let's hunt him up."

When they reached the study they found it empty. On the table lay a note for Brenda in her father's handwriting. It informed her very curtly that he had gone up to London for the day and would return that same evening. Harold looked grave, and Brenda was perplexed. It was so unexpected. Mr. Scarse seemed to be doing all he could to heap suspicion on his own head.

"Does he usually go off in this sudden fashion?" asked Captain Burton.

"Yes and no. Sometimes he tells me, sometimes he leaves a note. After all, Harold, we may be altogether mistaken. Perhaps father knows nothing at all about it."

"I hope so, Brenda. But from what you say he certainly knows this man, and it is strange there should be such a striking resemblance between them. The scrap of crape might easily have been torn off the scarf in the struggle."

"But there was no struggle," said Brenda, eagerly.

"I saw Mr. Malet for one moment when the lightning flashed; the next I heard a cry, and it was followed at once by a shot. There was no time for a struggle."

"You heard the cry first, and then the shot?"

"Yes. The shot must have killed the poor man at once. He did not cry again."

Harold reflected. "I saw Dr. Lincoln this morning at the Manor," he said slowly. "He deduces from the blackened skin and singed hair that the shot must have been fired at close quarters. Now, if the murderer saw Malet by that lightning flash, and was close at hand, he no doubt sprang forward and clutched the poor devil's arm while he placed the muzzle of the weapon at his temple. In that case Malet would utter a cry and the next moment drop dead. In his agony he might have gripped at the crape scarf, and have torn off the piece I found clenched in his hand."

"That is all purely hypothetical," said Brenda, fighting against her doubts.

"I know it is. But it seems to me the only way to account for your hearing the cry first, and for this piece of crape being in the hand of the corpse. Depend upon it, Brenda, your father can throw some light on the subject. Well, as he's gone to town, there's nothing for it but to wait till he comes back. Meanwhile I won't say anything about the piece of crape to any one."

"And what are you going to do now?" she asked, as he moved toward the study door.

"Return to the inn. I should like to know if any one else saw this stranger, and if they mistook him, as I did, for your father."

"Harold, Harold, do be careful," implored Brenda; "we may be misjudging father altogether, dear. Don't, I beg of you, get him into any trouble."

"On the contrary, dear, my object is to get him out of trouble. If I don't succeed in arriving at some explanation of this queer confusion of identities the police may take it up. Then it would be dangerous. Good-bye, dear; I shall be back shortly."

Brenda waved her hand as he left her, and returned to the study. She was filled with ominous foreboding, and trembled at the thought of possible complicity on the part of her father. His pronounced hatred of Malet, his agitation at the mention of the stranger, the odd idea of the crape scarf worn by the supposed criminal, and the morsel of it in the dead man's hand—these things collectively formed a mystery which Brenda could not fathom.

She looked again at the note which intimated that her father had gone to town, and from the straggling, scratching character of the handwriting she gathered that he must have been greatly agitated when he wrote it. Afterward she went to the kitchen, and skillfully questioned Mrs. Daw and Tilda about their master's departure. Both declared that he had said nothing to them about it. It seemed likely, then, that he had made up his mind on a sudden impulse and gone off in a hurry.

Brenda wondered vainly what it could all mean, and then rebuked herself severely for her suspicions. After all, her father would no doubt be able to give good reason for his hurried departure when he returned; the surrounding circumstances, strange as

they were, might prove to be all that was natural and obvious in the light of what he would have to say.

The dawn had brought wisdom to Mrs. Daw and the housemaid too, for they no longer spoke of giving notice. They were chattering like parrots about the murder, many exaggerated and wholly imaginary details of which had been supplied by butcher, baker and milkman. But Brenda learned that as yet no one was definitely suspected of the crime, and that the villagers were hopelessly bewildered at its committal.

About the stranger no word was said; and somewhat relieved in her mind, Brenda gave her orders for the day, and returned to the study. She sat down before the fire—which was lighted, as usual, in spite of the summer warmth—and gave herself up to thoughts of Harold. These were pleasant enough, but occasionally there would come the recollection of Van Zwieten and his calm insistence that she should be his wife. Then she shuddered, for the man fascinated her as a serpent fascinates a bird. There were moments when it came upon her that he might get his way in spite of her repulsion.

Idly looking into the fire, she noticed a fine white ash under the grate, disposed in a regular line. At first she took no heed of it, but presently she became aware that this was no coal *débris*, and her eye travelled along the line until she found an unburnt piece of the material, the remainder of which was ash. Growing pale, she bent down and picked up a tiny piece of crape. Undoubtedly it was crape—there

was enough saved from the burning to swear by. Brenda turned faint; from the long narrow outline of the white ash, from the scrap of material she held in her hand, it was certain that her father had flung a crape scarf under the grate, and had set fire to it. And she guessed that the scarf was the one worn by the stranger—the scarf from which the morsel in Harold's possession had been torn. Motionless and terrified, she pondered over the meaning of this destruction.

Before she could come to any conclusion, there was a shadow thrown across the floor, and Brenda, her nerves shaken, jumped up with a slight scream to see Van Zwieten step into the room through the French window. He looked unusually well pleased with himself, and smiled blandly when he saw her. In fact, she detected an exulting expression in his blue eyes, which vaguely terrified her. With the instinct to conceal the discovery of the burnt scarf, she thrust the scrap into her pocket, and turned to welcome Van Zwieten with a smile.

He looked at the fire, at her action, and seemed to connect the two. But he said nothing. No doubt he thought she had been about to burn something, and that he had interrupted her.

"Aha, Miss Scarse," he said politely, "I have been walking in the orchards to have a look at the spot where I murdered that man."

Brenda was annoyed at his satire, and rather foolishly showed her annoyance.

"You should make allowance for my state of mind last night," she said irritably. "I spoke without

thinking. Besides, I accused you of killing Harold, not poor Mr. Malet."

"Quite so. But you might as well say I killed the one as the other. Pardon me, I will say no more. I have been to the place where the poor man was murdered, and I have made discoveries. Ah, you English, you have no eyes! Dozens of people have been round this morning, but they have seen nothing. I have seen much."

"What have you seen — what have you discovered?" asked Brenda, anxiously.

Van Zwieten clicked his heels together in foreign fashion, and bowed. "Miss Scarse, I am a wise man," he said, smiling; "wise men never talk. But if you will be wise also, and give me the right to tell you what I know, why then ——"

"How can I give you the right?"

"By accepting me as your future husband."

"No, a thousand times, no. I am engaged to Captain Burton."

"Ah, Captain Burton! I quite forgot that young gentleman. I have something to say to him. He is, no doubt, still at his hotel. I will call."

"If your object is to make him give me up, you may save yourself the trouble of calling," said Brenda, quietly. "We are engaged, and nothing you can say or do can break our engagement."

"Ah! I think otherwise."

"Mr. van Zwieten, will you understand once and for all that I refuse to have anything to do with you. I refuse to marry you."

Van Zwieten shook his head. "I cannot accept

your refusal. I have made up my mind that you shall marry me, and marry me you must. I have a strong will, Miss Scarse."

"I also, and so has Captain Burton. You can't bully me into being your slave."

"Pardon me, I should be the slave," said the Dutchman, blandly. "As for Captain Burton, poof! I will sweep him from my path. When he is in South Africa, I shall be there also."

"He is not going to South Africa."

"Oh, yes, I think so. He is a soldier, and your soldiers will have much to do in South Africa shortly."

"Mr. van Zwieten, I believe you are a Boer spy."

"Indeed! Why do you believe so?"

"You seem to be so certain of the war. You are going out to the Transvaal——"

"I am. You too, Miss Scarse—as my wife. Ah, do not look angry. You must accept the inevitable with a good grace. As to my being a spy, there is no need for me to act so low a part as that. I think there will be war because I read the sign of the times. Europe is with us——"

"Did your friend Dr. Leyds tell you so?" she asked scornfully.

"Perhaps. But this is idle talk. I am not what you think me. When the time comes you will know—what I intend you to know. So sure am I that you will be my wife, that I am content to return to London this day and leave you with Captain Burton."

"The sooner you go the better pleased I shall be."

"Ach! What English hospitality! How charmingly said!"

Brenda turned on him with tears of rage in her eyes. "You force me to be rude," she said, almost breaking down in the face of this persistence. "I have never been spoken to as you speak to me. An English gentleman can take 'no' for an answer."

"But I love you too much to accept such an answer."

"If you loved me, you would not worry me so. Please go, Mr. van Zwieten. Oh! I wish my father were here to protect me!" cried poor Brenda, keeping back her tears with difficulty.

"Call him, Miss Scarse. He has not gone out today, has he?"

"He has gone to London."

Clever and self-possessed as Van Zwieten was, this intelligence disconcerted him. He started and frowned. "To London!" he repeated. "He was here a couple of hours ago."

Brenda handed him the note left by her father, and turned away. "You can see for yourself. I suppose you will go after luncheon."

Van Zwieten read the note and frowned again. "Yes, I will go after luncheon," he said. "In the meantime I will see Captain Burton, I think; oh, yes, I think I shall come to terms with that young gentleman. Till luncheon, Miss Scarse," and, bowing with a mocking smile, he stepped out of the window, leaving Brenda puzzled and uneasy.

Meanwhile, Harold was talking with Inspector Woke at the inn. He had found that official waiting for him on his return from the cottage, and had at once consented to his request for a private conversation. He

had no idea that Woke suspected him in any way, and answered his questions with the utmost frankness.

"I went to the Rectory last night to see Mr. Slocum, who is an old friend of mine," he said, and left here about eight o'clock. It was shortly after nine when I returned."

"At what time did you arrive here?" asked Woke, watching his companion's face.

"About ten o'clock."

"Oh! and you left the Rectory at nine. Did it take you an hour to walk a quarter of a mile?"

Captain Burton stared, and his dark face flushed. "I don't know why you wish me to answer you so precisely," he said haughtily; "but it so happened that I was caught in the storm, and stood under a tree for some time."

"The storm again," murmured Woke, rubbing his chin. "Lady Jenny Malet and your brother were both caught in the storm."

"I know that," retorted Burton, impatiently. "Lady Jenny was coming to the Rectory to see me on business. This morning I learned that she was caught in the storm and turned back. My brother sprained his foot. I know all this. Well?"

"Mr. Malet was murdered at half-past nine."

"So the doctor told me. Well?"

Harold was so unsuspicious that the inspector felt uncomfortable, and did not know very well how to put his doubts into words. "Did you see Mr. Malet last night?" he asked.

"No, I did not."

"Oh! If you had, would you have spoken to him?"

"What the devil do you mean?" asked Captain Burton, sharply.

"Only this. That I have been informed at the Manor—by Roberts the butler, if you want to know—that you and Mr. Malet had a quarrel yesterday."

"We had, over family business. That has nothing to do with you."

"I'm not so sure about that," said Woke, drily. "You used threats. You said you would make it hot for him."

Captain Burton jumped up with clenched fists. "Are you trying to make out that I murdered Malet?" he asked savagely. "If so, put your meaning more clearly, and I shall know how to defend myself."

"I don't say you murdered him," protested Woke, soothingly; "but you quarrelled with him, you threatened him, and you were out of doors between nine and ten, during which time he was killed. The position is suspicious—don't be angry, Captain Burton, I am only doing my duty. Of course you can prove an *alibi*."

"I can give you my word that I did not see Malet last night. I saw his body after I had been informed of his murder. As to an *alibi*, no one saw me after I left the Rectory, so far as I know. I stood under a tree for a time; then I walked round by Mr. Scarse's cottage."

"Had you any particular reason to do so?"

Captain Burton flushed and bit his lip. "I could refuse to answer that question," he said at length; "but as you suspect me I will be as candid as possible. I am engaged to Miss Scarse, and I went round with the

intention of seeing her on the same matter about which I went to the Rectory. However, I concluded it was too late, so I returned here."

"You answer frankly, Captain Burton," said Woke rather disconsolately, "and I say again, I don't accuse you of the crime."

Harold bowed ironically. "Have you any idea who committed it?"

"No," replied Burton, keeping his own counsel, "I have not."

Woke rose to go. Then he looked at Harold and hesitated. Finally he spoke in a confidential tone. "Do you know if Mr. Scarse is mad?" was his strange question.

Burton suppressed a smile. "Not that I know of," he replied wonderingly. "Why?"

"Because he was seen in the village yesterday afternoon with a yard or two of crape around his neck—crape, Captain Burton—a strange material for a scarf!"

"Very strange," replied Burton, keeping strict guard on his tongue. He saw that other people besides himself had mistaken the stranger for Scarse; but he did not correct the inspector lest he might say too much. For Brenda's sake it would not do for that subject to be gone into too minutely. "You had better see Mr. Scarse yourself about the matter," said he at length; "he has gone up to town, but may return this evening."

Woke nodded and withdrew. He had not gained much by his conversation. Harold was evidently guiltless; or, at all events, there seemed to be no evi-

dence to connect him with the crime. The poor inspector, accustomed to open murders of the poker or hatchet order, was wholly at a loss how to deal with the intricate criminal problem presented to him. He could not find the weapon with which the crime had been committed; he could gain no tangible intelligence likely to fasten the crime on to any one person. At last, utterly perplexed, he took himself off.

Harold watched him go with some sense of relief. He saw that the case, handled by a man of such inexperience and meagre intelligence, would come to nothing, and for Brenda's sake he was glad. He could not help thinking that Scarse was in some way connected with the matter. Much would depend upon the explanation he had to give regarding his "double." Until that mystery was solved, nothing could be done.

He was still pondering over the pros and cons of it all when he was interrupted by the waiter with the intelligence that Mr. van Zwieten wished to see him. Wondering what his rival could have to say to him, he directed that he should be shown in. When Van Zwieten appeared, Harold received him coldly. He did not offer to shake hands.

"You wish to see me?" was all he said.

"Ach, yes!" replied Van Zwieten, with a beaming smile. "You will let me sit down." He threw himself lightly on the sofa. "Thank you. Yes, Captain Burton, I have come to see you about a lady."

"I know whom you mean," said Harold, his voice tremulous with rage, "and I must ask you to leave that lady's name unspoken. I refuse to discuss the matter you have come about."

"It will be better for you to agree," said Van Zwieten, with a steely gleam of his blue eyes. "I come to see you about more than Miss Scarse."

Harold sat down suddenly. It flashed across him that the Dutchman knew something connected with the crime, so significantly did he speak. Resolved to know the worst, he decided to let him have his say, although he winced at the idea of Brenda's name on the lips of the man. However, there was no help for it. The position was dangerous, and this was not the time for squeamishness.

"Say what you have to say and go then," he said, holding himself in hand.

"I can say that in a few words," said Van Zwieten; "you are engaged to be married to Miss Scarse."

"Yes," assented Burton, breathing quickly.

"Know then that I love her, Captain Burton, and I wish to marry her."

"Miss Scarse has consented to marry me. You have—oh, damn you, get out, or I'll kick you! How dare you talk about Miss Scarse—about my private affairs?"

The young man was on his feet, furious with rage. It wanted little to make him hurl himself on Van Zwieten; but the Dutchman never flinched, never ceased to smile. "You must give up Miss Scarse to me!"

"I'll see you at the devil first," was the fierce reply.

"In that case I *must* talk of your private affairs."

"You have done so—you are doing so."

"Not yet. But now—Captain Burton, I hold you in the hollow of my hand."

"What do you mean?" asked the startled Harold.

Van Zweiten bent forward and spoke low for a few moments. When he had finished, Captain Burton's face was grey and drawn and terror-stricken.

The Dutchman continued to smile.

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT MR. SCARSE ADMITTED.

For the next week Brenda lived in a state of bewilderment. Everything seemed to go wrong. Her father did not return, but wrote that his things were to be sent on to London, and that Brenda herself was to leave the cottage in charge of Mrs. Daw, and come up in a fortnight's time. Van Zwieten bowed himself out of Chippingholt without having told her of his interview with Harold. With his usual cunning, he had left Harold himself to do that; but Harold, leaving a message for Brenda that he was suddenly recalled to his regimental duties, had himself left by a later train, without either explanation or word of farewell.

Brenda was hopelessly at a loss to understand her lover's action, and in her despair sought Lady Jenny.

It was a week after the inquest, and the two women were seated in Lady Jenny's boudoir, a pleasant rose-hued room which looked out on to a Dutch garden. The usual verdict of willful murder against some person or persons unknown had been brought in by the usual opaque country jury, directed by a not over-intelligent coroner. Gilbert Malet's body had been laid away in the family vault, and Lady Jenny was utilizing for her husband the mourning she had worn for her father.

Brenda was paying her now a visit of condolence; but Lady Jenny showed clearly by her manner and curt

speech that she stood in no need of sympathy. It was amazing to see the change that had taken place in her since her husband's death. Formerly she had been a gay, frivolous little woman, with ever a smile on her face; now Brenda found her a small image of stone, as hard, and every whit as cold. She could scarcely believe it was the same woman.

Finding that her sympathetic references to the dead man were received with coldness, Brenda tactfully changed the conversation. She mentioned her own anxiety about Harold's abrupt departure, and found Lady Jenny quite ready to talk on that subject. She loved Brenda and admired Harold, and wished to see them married. Consequently she was only too glad to smooth down Brenda's feathers, which were a good deal ruffled by her lover's strange behavior.

"My dear, you know a soldier's time is not his own," she said. "I expect Harold got a telegram, and had just time to pack and catch the first train."

"He should have sent for me," said Brenda; "I should have seen him off at the station."

"Well, I've no doubt he will explain his reasons when you meet in town. You go there next week, and Harold is only at Aldershot. He has written to you?"

"Several times, and always fondly. But he has never explained his leaving without seeing me. It's no good, Lady Jenny; I confess I am angry. Yet he may have avoided seeing me on account of the murder."

Lady Jenny looked up sharply. "Why should he?"

Brenda hesitated. She was thinking of Harold's

suspicions regarding her father, and did not want to tell them to the dead man's widow. For the moment she had forgotten to whom she was speaking. But, having committed herself so far, she was obliged to get out of the difficulty as best she could.

"You know Inspector Woke suspected Harold?" she said, nervously avoiding Lady Jenny's sharp black eyes; "he said——"

"I know—I know. Woke told me of his suspicions. He's a fool—to suspect Harold of killing Gilbert just because they had a few words is ridiculous, and I told him so. Nobody will ever know who killed Gilbert."

"You speak very confidently," said Brenda, amazed at her hard tone.

"Because I feel confident," retorted the other. "There is not a scrap of evidence against any one. All that could be said was said at the inquest. Woke and his police have been doing their best to get at the truth, and have failed. The revolver was not found; no one knew why Gilbert went out walking on that night, or whom he met, and—oh, the whole thing is over and done with. It is only one more of the many undiscovered crimes."

"Do you suspect any one?"

"Not a soul. Why should I? Gilbert had many enemies—so he said—but I don't know any of them, and I don't suppose any one of them would have gone the length of murder."

"The police here are such sillies," put in Brenda. "Why don't you get a clever detective down from London?"

"Because I think the case is hopeless, my dear," said the widow, gloomily, "and because it would cost a great deal too much money. I have not yet gone into the affairs of the estate, but I am afraid I shall not be over well off. Gilbert would play, and I suppose I was extravagant. We lived far beyond our means. This place is mortgaged heavily."

"What—the Manor?" asked Brenda, startled.

"Yes, all our property is mortgaged. I expect I shall be left with nothing but the ten thousand pounds for which Gilbert's life was insured. Fortunately it was settled on me at the time of our marriage, so his creditors can't touch it. I hate being poor," cried Lady Jenny, viciously; "and, so far as I can see, I shall be—very poor."

"I had no idea things were so bad."

"Nor had I until six months ago, when Gilbert told me. We have lived from hand to mouth since then. All Gilbert's efforts have been directed to staving off ruin."

Brenda's heart sank within her. "What about Harold's money?"

"Oh, Harold and Wilfred are all right," said Lady Jenny, hastily; "at least, I suppose so. Gilbert always said that he took good care of their money, and I think he did. He was not the man to place himself within reach of the law by appropriating trust monies—at least, I can't believe he would do such a thing. But next week the whole matter will be gone into. Then I suppose you and Harold will get married."

"Of course. In any case—money or no money—we shall be married."

"Oh, I don't know. It's absurd marrying on nothing. Gilbert was well off when I became his wife, or I shouldn't have married him; had I known he was a gambler, I should have refused him. He made a nice mess of his life."

"I thought you loved him."

"I did, a deal better than he deserved," said Lady Jenny, bitterly. "But—but—oh, what is the use of talking! He was a bad man—another woman—his fault—and I—my dear, don't you trust Harold. All men are bad."

"I always understood Mr. Malet was devoted to you."

"So did I—until I found him out. It came about in the strangest way—the discovery, I mean." Lady Jenny paused, as though considering whether to speak out or not. Finally she decided to hold her tongue. "But then these things concern only myself," said she, abruptly. "He deceived me—I was jealous—that is all you need know. But I cannot say that I sorrow for him now that he is dead."

"Oh, how can you speak so?"

"Because I am a woman, and jealous. When Harold deceives you, Brenda, you will feel as I do—feel that you could kill him with your own hand." Lady Jenny looked suddenly at the girl's blonde beauty. "But no! you are a cold Saxon girl, with little such spirit in you. I—my father was Irish, my mother Italian, and I have in me all the fire of Celt and Latin. It was well for Gilbert that he died when he did," she said between her teeth; "I don't know what I should have done!"

The bitterness and passion with which she spoke

were both new to Brenda, who had never suspected her of such depth of feeling. Being in the dark, more or less, concerning its cause, she hardly knew what to say, so she held her peace. She felt that nothing she could say would alter her friend's feelings, and might possibly even aggravate them. After a turn up and down the room, the widow resumed her seat, and seemed to become calmer.

"Where are you going to stay in town, Brenda?"

"With my aunt, Mrs. St. Leger, in Kensington. My father always lives in his own rooms, you know. He doesn't want to be troubled with a grown-up daughter."

"He won't be troubled long if Harold is to be believed."

"You mean our marriage? No! But you know my father doesn't approve of it. He wants me to marry Mr. van Zwieten."

"That Dutchman! Horrid creature! I never could bear him. Gilbert liked him, though."

"Indeed!" said Brenda, rather surprised. "Mr. van Zwieten told me he and Mr. Malet were not friendly."

Lady Jenny laughed in a way not good to hear. "Very likely. Van Zwieten is cunning—slim, as his countrymen call it. I know more about him though than he thinks."

"Do you know who he is?"

"Yes, I know who he is, and how he makes his money, and why he is in England."

"How did you find out?" asked Brenda, breathlessly.

"Oh, *that* I mustn't tell you—suppose you were to tell Van Zwieten?"

"Tell him!" repeated Miss Scarse, her face crimson, her eyes bright. "Why, I hate him more than any man I ever knew. He wants to marry me, and won't take a refusal. My father supports him, and, for Harold's sake, I have to fight them both."

"And you are not afraid of so formidable a foe?" said the widow, seeing her eyes droop.

"Not of my father, but I am afraid of Mr. van Zwieten. He is a terrible man, and has so powerful a will that he can almost impose it on mine. There is something hypnotic about him, and I feel scarcely mistress of myself when he is near me."

"Nonsense! You are fanciful, child."

"Indeed—indeed I am not," protested the girl, eagerly. "But you don't know how strong and obstinate he is. He never loses his temper, he just looks and looks with those terrible eyes of his, and repeats his desire—his will—his intentions—over and over again. I feel like a rabbit in the presence of a snake. And that's why I want Harold and me to be married soon, because I feel, if we are not, Mr. van Zwieten will compel me in spite of myself."

Lady Jenny bent forward and caught Brenda's wrists. "My dear, if Van Zwieten tries these pranks on, you send for me. If any one can save you from him, I can."

"But how?"

"That is my affair. Van Zwieten may be all you say, but I can make him afraid of me. Now you must go, my dear. I have a lot of letters to write."

Brenda went off much puzzled over Lady Jenny's attitude toward Van Zwieten. Evidently she knew something to the man's disadvantage. But Brenda was doubtful whether her friend could use her knowledge sufficiently cleverly to crush the Dutchman. His resource was extraordinary, and he was clever and unscrupulous enough to be able to defend himself in an emergency. However, she felt it was no use trying to forecast the future. She resolved to keep out of Van Zwieten's way and get Harold to marry her as soon as possible. Once she was Mrs. Burton, the Dutchman would be obliged to cease persecuting her.

For the next few days Brenda was fully occupied with her packing. As Harold was in London, or rather so near London that he could come up there quickly, she was glad to be going. She felt she must see him and have from him an explanation, and an understanding as to when their marriage could take place. At her aunt's she would be safe from Van Zwieten, since Mr. St. Leger did not like him; but Brenda knew well that for his own ends—whatever these might be—her father would, as ever, insist on her favoring Van Zwieten.

The only way to put an end to the intolerable situation was to marry Harold. With that, her father would no doubt wash his hands of her, but at least she would be relieved from the persecutions of the Dutchman, and would have some one to love and protect her. So it was with thankfulness that Brenda left the cottage.

In the train she found a travelling companion whom

she did not expect—none other than Harold's brother. Wilfred's foot was now quite well, and he looked better in health than when Brenda had last seen him. He joined her at Langton Junction, and they travelled up in the same carriage, which they were fortunate enough to have to themselves. She was pleased that it was so, for she wanted to talk confidentially with Wilfred. They were the best of good friends.

"I am so glad your foot is all right again, Wilfred," she said cheerfully. "It is such a painful thing—a sprain."

"Yet for all that I am not sorry I sprained it," said Wilfred, turning his thin white face toward the girl.

"Not sorry! What do you mean?"

"Oh, it's an ill wind—you know."

"Yes, I suppose it is. But it's difficult to see what sort of 'good' one can look for from a sprained ankle!"

"Well, in this instance I fancy it did me a good turn. You see it rendered me physically helpless for the time being."

"My dear Wilfred—I confess you puzzle me."

"Do I? Well, I'll tell you what I mean. The night, almost the hour, I sprained my ankle, poor Malet was shot. So no one can possibly accuse *me* of having shot him!"

"But who *would* dare to accuse you of such a thing?"

"Oh, I don't know; that fool of an inspector was quite prepared to fix his beastly suspicions on Harold—told me as much."

"I know; but then you see Harold and Mr. Malet quarrelled. That was the reason Mr. Woke was suspicious. But of course Harold laughed at the idea."

"I should think so. I confess the whole thing licks me. I can't imagine who can have done it."

"No one knows. Lady Jenny says no one ever will know!"

"I suppose not. It seems to be relegated to the list of undiscovered crimes. Do you know, Brenda, I *have* had my suspicions!"

A cold hand clutched the girl's heart. She immediately thought of her father. "Have you?" she faltered. "Of whom?"

"Well, I wouldn't tell every one, as I have really no sort of basis for them. They are the purest suspicions. But I suspect that big Dutchman who was staying at your place."

"Van Zwieten!" Brenda's mind ran over the events of that terrible night. The Dutchman had been out; he had come in after her. But again her father had told the servants that Van Zwieten was in the study with him—a distinct falsehood. Whichever way she looked at it, her father seemed to be mixed up in the matter. "Yet what possible motive could Van Zwieten have had to impel him to such a crime?" she asked Wilfred.

"It might be a political crime," said the young man, his face lighting up as it invariably did when he talked politics. "Gilbert was an Imperialist—always preaching and writing against the Boers. Van Zwieten is Dutch, and is going out to an appointment at Pretoria; also he is an intimate friend of Dr. Leyds.

He might have wished to get Gilbert out of the way because he was dangerous to his schemes."

"Surely he wouldn't have gone the length of murder for such a reason."

"Oh, I don't know. If he could without being found out, I am certain he would. I don't say Van Zwieten fired the shot himself, but he might have hired some one to do it."

"What makes you think that, Wilfred?"

"Well, I was talking to the station-master at Chippingholt. He said that a man in a dark overcoat with a soft hat pulled over his eyes went to Langton Junction by the 10:30 train—the last train on that night. Van Zwieten saw him off at the station. He was seen to follow the man to the compartment and put his head through the window. There was evidently an understanding between them. Now you know, Brenda, few strangers come to Chippingholt, for there is nothing to see there. It was odd, to say the least of it, that Van Zwieten should have seen this fellow off. Moreover, he just left after the murder was committed."

"I don't see though how you are justified from this in thinking that either Van Zwieten or the other man is implicated in the murder," said Brenda after a pause. "They might simply have met on business."

"What sort of business?"

"I can't say, I am not in Mr. van Zwieten's confidence."

Wilfred's eyes flashed. "I wish I was!" he said emphatically. "I believe the fellow is a Boer spy!"

"I thought so too, and I told him so."

"What did he say?"

"He denied it. Wilfred, did any one see the face of this stranger?"

"No. He kept his coat collar turned up, and his hat well over his eyes. Why?"

"Nothing, I was only wondering." Brenda dreaded lest she should hear that the stranger was he who so closely resembled her father. She wondered, too, whether it was possible her father could have assisted this man to escape after he had shot Mr. Malet; for that the crime had been committed by the same man who wore the black crape scarf seemed conclusively proved by the presence of that piece of it in the victim's hand.

"I intend to keep a pretty close watch on Mr. van Zwieten," went on Wilfred. "In fact, that is why I have come up to town. If, as I suspect, he is a spy, the authorities must know of it. In the event of hostilities breaking out between this country and the Transvaal, he would of course be arrested at once."

"But you cannot prove his complicity in this matter, Wilfred?"

"I intend to have a shot at it any way," replied the young man, grimly. "But come, Brenda, here we are at Victoria. Let me put you in a hansom."

"Do come and see me, Wilfred. I'm at Mrs. St. Leger's."

"Thanks; I will. I may ask you to help me too in my pursuit of this Dutchman."

"How you seem to hate Mr. van Zwieten, Wilfred," she exclaimed. "Have you any especial reason to dislike him?"

"I hate him because he is the enemy of my country."

As the cab drove away, Brenda mused on the fervent patriotism of the man. Frail, neurotic, frequently ailing, a prey to chronic melancholia, yet he was of the stuff of which such men as Hampden, Pym and Cromwell are made. He believed in the greatness of England as he did in the existence of God. Her every triumph sent a thrill through him, her lightest disaster cut him to the quick. It was as if he were ever under the influence of a fixed idea. But if he were, the idea was at least a noble and an elevating one. His spirit was strong as his body was weak, and through his body he paid dearly for his patriotic emotions.

It had been Brenda's intention to drive at once to Kensington, but when she recalled all that Wilfred had said, she felt she must see her father, if only to clear her mind of suspicion. Had he assisted—as seemed probable—in the escape of the unknown man, he must have known that the creature was a murderer, since there could be no other reason for such a hurried and secretive flight. She felt she could not rest until she had the truth from his own lips. Hence she told the man to drive to his chambers in Star Street.

Fortunately the old man was in. He looked leaner and whiter, she thought, than ever. He was buried in the evening papers, from which he was cutting out slips, which he proceeded to paste into a large book. It was from these clippings of editorial opinion and collected data that he constructed his speeches, throwing in as flavoring a dash of his own dogmatic optimism, and some free expression reflecting the

true humanity of other nations as compared with that of his own brutal country, of which, in truth, he had little to say that was not abusive.

As usual, he received Brenda coldly, and wondered why she had not driven at once to her aunt's. She soon explained to him her reasons.

"Father, I am worrying myself to death about that man with the crape scarf."

Scarse colored and averted his eyes. "Why, pray?" he asked.

"Because I can't get over his resemblance to you. Is he a relative?"

"No." Scarse cleared his throat and spoke. "The fact is, Brenda, I wore that crape scarf and snuff-colored coat myself. I am the man Harold saw."

CHAPTER VII.

AUNT JUDY.

FOR a while Brenda did not grasp the full significance of her father's admission. She stared at him blankly. Then the recollection of that morsel of crape in the dead man's hand, and all that it meant, came upon her with overwhelming force. She could not cry, but a choking sensation came at her throat. Her father was the man who had worn the crape scarf—then her father was the man who had murdered Gilbert Malet!

"What is it, Brenda? Why do you look at me like that?" he asked nervously.

He stood beyond the circle of light cast by the lamp on the table, and she could not see his face, but by the tremor of his voice she guessed that he was badly frightened. She pulled herself together—what the effort cost her no one but herself knew—and came at once to the gist of the thing.

"Father, did you shoot Mr. Malet?"

"I? No. Are you mad, girl, to say such a thing? How dare you—to me, your father?" Indignation apparently choked further speech on the part of Mr. Scarse.

"God help me! yes, you are my father," wailed Brenda. She threw herself face downwards on the sofa and sobbed bitterly. There was that in her father's nervous denial which impelled her to believe

that her suspicions were correct. If he had not himself killed Malet, at least he knew who had. But at the present moment Brenda firmly believed that his own hand had fired the fatal shot.

"Brenda, listen to me; you speak foolishly; we must understand one another. What grounds have you for making such a terrible accusation against me?"

The old man's voice was now steady, and he spoke harshly. He poked the fire and expanded his thin, dry hands to the blaze. It was a haggard face which the spurting flames illumined; but the mouth was firmly set, and there was a hard, dogged expression in the eyes. As Brenda made no reply, and still continued to sob, he cast an impatient glance at her prostrate figure and went over to the sideboard. Thence he returned with a glass of wine.

"Drink this, Brenda, and don't be a fool. I did not murder the man."

The girl sat up and slowly drank the wine. Her father crossed over to the door and locked it, upon which the girl laughed contemptuously.

"Do you think I have the police in waiting?" she said.

"That is not the way to speak to your father," snarled he, sitting down.

But the wine had put new life into Brenda, and she was regaining courage with her returning color. Not by this man—the father who had been no father to her—was she to be daunted. With a quick movement she removed the lampshade, and the sudden spread of the light showed her Mr. Scarse biting his nails with anything but a reassuring expression on his face. At

that moment Brenda felt she hated the author of her being.

"You are my father in name, nothing more," she said coldly. "In no way have you ever attempted to gain my affection. You kept me at school as long as you could, and only when it was forced upon you did you take charge of my life. I have no love for you, nor have you for me; but I always respected you until now."

Scarse winced, and his parchment-like skin grew pink. "And why don't you respect me now?"

"Because I am certain that, even if you did not kill him, you had something to do with the death of Mr. Malet!"

"That is untrue," replied he, composedly.

Brenda looked at him keenly. "The murderer wore a crape scarf. Of that I have direct evidence. I also know that you burnt that scarf."

"How do you know that?" he snapped.

"I found the ashes under the grate, and I picked up a scrap of the crape. Nevertheless, in spite of your admission, I am not certain now in my own mind that it was you who wore it. Father, you were not the man whom Harold met."

"I am—I was," insisted Scarse, doggedly. "I put on that old coat because I couldn't find the one I usually wear. As to the scarf, I wore it in token of my sorrow for the way in which this country is being ruined by its statesmen."

But Brenda declined to accept this explanation.

"You are not mad, father," she said quietly; "and only a madman would wear yards of crape round his

neck in mourning for the delinquencies of his country's leaders; and only a madman would have killed Mr. Malet!" She paused, and, as he made no reply, continued: "The man Harold mistook for you was seen by other people, who also made the same mistake. What he came to Chippingholt for I know as well as you do. He came with the full intention of killing Mr. Malet."

"Go on, go on," jeered her father; "you are making out a fine case against me."

"Not against you, but against this relative of yours. Ah! you wince. I am right. He *is* a relative. No person who wasn't could bear so strong a resemblance to another. He is some relation of whom you are ashamed—a twin brother, for all I know. He was in your study that day when you said it was Van Zwieten who was with you."

"He was not!" retorted Scarse, angrily. "How dare you make me out a liar? Van Zwieten was with me. I locked the door of the study because we had quarrelled. He insisted on leaving the room, and, as I refused to open the door, he stepped out of the window, and went round and rang the front-door bell for admittance."

"That is an ingenious, but a far-fetched explanation, father."

"It is the true one. You can take or leave it."

"I leave it, then," said Brenda, calmly. "You had the stranger in your study, and you afterwards sent him off by the 10:30 train. He was seen at the station!"

Scarse started. "By whom?" he asked hurriedly.

"By Van Zwieten and the station-master!"

"Van Zwieten?" repeated Scarse, irritably. "He saw—who told you all this rubbish?"

"Wilfred. The station-master told him. Besides, it is not rubbish. Oh, father, why won't you be frank with me? We have not much feeling for one another, but still I am your daughter, and I want to help you; so does Harold ——"

"What has he to do with it?" asked Scarse, sharply.

"It was Harold who searched the corpse before it was taken to the Manor," replied Brenda, speaking slowly. "In the clenched right hand a morsel of black crape was found. Father, it was torn off that scarf!"

"You cannot be certain of that."

"How otherwise could so strange a material as crape come to be in the dead man's hand? He cried out before he was shot; I heard him. He must have clutched at his assailant and torn a piece from his scarf."

"Did you see me shoot Mr. Malet?"

"I saw no one shoot him; but I am certain it was that man."

Scarse rose and paced up and down the room. "I was the man, I tell you, who wore the scarf," he said for the third time, "and I never even saw Malet on that night. I have no brother, no relatives of any kind, save your aunt, Mrs. St. Leger."

"You won't trust me?" said Brenda, sadly.

"There is nothing more to say," replied her father, his features set hard as a flint. "It is useless my giving you the facts if you won't believe them. I have

no idea who the man was who was seen at the station. Van Zwieten said nothing to me about it. I am the man Harold took for a stranger, and I cut Captain Burton because I dislike him very much. I did not see Mr. Malet—certainly I did not kill him—and—and I have no more to say."

"How do you account for that piece of crape in the hand of ——"

"Brenda!" interrupted he, turning on her, "I could give you an explanation of that which would amaze you; but I will rest content with saying that the scrap you refer to was not torn off the scarf I wore. I burnt the scarf after I had had it on once, because I thought —well, because I thought it was foolish of me."

"Father, I am certain you are not speaking openly."

"No, I am not. If I did, you would at once see that you were wrong in suspecting me of this crime. I am not guilty of it."

"No, I don't think you are," said Brenda; "but you are shielding some one."

"Perhaps I am," replied he, smiling sourly; "but not the stranger you have invented—he does not exist." He paused, and then asked abruptly, "Has Burton mentioned this matter to any one?"

"Only to me. For your sake he keeps silent."

"Oh!" Scarse smiled sourly again. "I suppose he thinks he'll force me into consenting to your engagement that way. But he won't. You shall marry Van Zwieten."

Brenda rose and drew her cloak around her. "I have told you I will marry no one but Harold," she said coldly. "There is no need to discuss the matter

further. My cab is waiting, so I'll drive on to Aunt Judy's."

"With your mind somewhat more at rest, I trust," said he, as she unfastened the door.

"Yes, so far as you personally are concerned. But you know who murdered that man, and you are shielding him."

"I deny that!" Then, as she went out of the door, he ran after her, and said in a loud whisper, "Think if there is no one else who wears crape at Chippingholt?"

Before she could make reply to this he closed the door. She did not pay much attention to it, because she had made up her mind about the stranger, whom she felt convinced her father was shielding. She went down the stairs and got into her cab. In a few moments she was again in Piccadilly on her way west. There at Aunt Judy's she felt sure at least of a warm welcome.

A stout, good-natured woman was Mrs. St. Leger. She conceived it to be her one duty in life to keep her husband in a good temper. And experience had proved to her that the only means of performing this was by a strict attention to his diet—no easy task, seeing that he was a peppery old Indian colonel with a liver and a temper. He had long since retired from the army after a career of frontier skirmishing in Northern India, and now passed his time between his home in Kensington and his military club. In both places he was greatly feared for his hectoring manner and flow of language, which was well-nigh irresistible. Mrs. St. Leger was always thankful when the

meals passed off without direct conflict, and she spent most of her day reading cookery books for the unearthing of delicacies, and having unearthed them, in consulting the cook how to prepare them for the fastidious palate of her lord and master.

The old couple were fond of Brenda—Aunt Judy because the girl was a comfort to her in some vague sort of way which she could not define, and Uncle Bill because Brenda was not in the least in awe of his temper, and gave him every bit as good as she received.

To each other Colonel and Mrs. St. Leger were always Julia and William; but Brenda from her earliest childhood had known them as Aunt Judy and Uncle Bill, and to those fond appellations she still clung. Had any one else dared to address the colonel so, he would assuredly have taken an apoplectic fit on the spot, being so predisposed and of "full habit"; but Brenda he graciously permitted to be thus familiar. To sum up the worthy colonel's character, it may be stated that he hated Mr. Scarse as bitterly as he hated cold meat; and to any one who knew him the comparison would have been all sufficient.

"Dear, dear child," cooed Mrs. St. Leger as Brenda sipped her cup of tea in the drawing-room, "how good it is to see you again. William——"

"Very glad, very glad," rasped the colonel, who was glowering on the hearthrug. "I want to hear all about this iniquitous murder. Poor Malet! Clever chap, but always contradicting—good fellow all the same. Wrote and talked well against these damned Little Englanders. Gad! I'd forgive Judas Iscariot if he did that!"

"Have they caught the murderer, dear?" asked Aunt Judy, with a beaming smile on her fat face.

"No," replied Brenda. "Nor do I believe they ever will catch him."

"Him!" roared Uncle Bill, chuckling. "Egad! and how d'you know it's a 'him'? Might be a 'her.' Eh, what? I suppose in these days a woman can fire a revolver as well as a man, eh?"

"A woman!—why a woman?"

"Eh, why? I don't know. Why should the poor devil have been killed at all?"

"Yes, why should he have been killed at all, that's what William and I want to know," bleated Aunt Judy. "How does Lady Jenny take it, Brenda, dear?"

"Oh, very quietly. She is much less grieved than I had expected her to be."

"H'm!" rasped the colonel, in a parade voice. "I dare say she is pleased for that matter. Most of 'em are when they bury their husbands. I can fancy Julia smiling when I toddle."

"Oh, William, how can you? By the way, has Lady Jenny been left well off, Brenda?"

"No, I am afraid not. She says Mr. Malet was terribly extravagant."

"He was a gambler," shouted the colonel, "well known round the clubs. When he wasn't dropping it at Monte Carlo, he was running amuck on 'Change. Always had bad luck that chap," added he, rubbing his nose; "lost thousands. The wonder is he didn't go under long ago. Shouldn't be surprised to hear Lady Jenny had been left without a sixpence."

"Oh, no, uncle; she has ten thousand pounds at

least; her husband's life was insured for that, and she says his creditors can't touch that."

"Perhaps not, but hers can. I knew old Lord Scilly —no end of a spendthrift, and his daughter's like him, or I'm mistaken. Women are all spendthrifts——"

"Well, I'm sure, William——"

"Oh! you're all right, Julia. There are worse than you. Nice little woman Lady Jenny, though, all the same—good sporting sort, shoots jolly straight, and all that."

"A thing I highly disapprove of," said Mrs. St. Leger, shaking her head mildly. "I'm glad, dear child," turning to Brenda, "that you don't do that sort of thing. It is so unladylike, I think."

"Perhaps it's a pity I don't, aunt. If I go to the front with Harold I might be all the better for knowing how to pull the trigger of a gun or a revolver."

"Harold!—what, young Burton!" growled the colonel. "Are you going to marry him? Is it settled? It is! Well, he's not a bad young fellow; but as a soldier! pooh! there are no soldiers nowadays. The army's going to the dogs."

"But, Brenda, dear child, what would you be doing at the front?" asked the old lady. "There is no war."

"Not yet; but every one says there is going to be war in South Africa."

"Of course there will be," snapped the colonel. "Do you think we're goin' to be defied by a couple of punny little Republics? Damnable insolence, I call it. They ought to be whipped, and they will be. Your father supports the beggars, Brenda, and he's a——"

"William! Her father—my brother!"

"Beg pardon, Julia; but he is, and you know he is. Going against his own country. Ha! here are the evening papers. We'll see what further rubbish these pro-Boer idiots have been talking. Julia, please see that dinner is punctual. And, Brenda, don't you be late. I hate waiting for my meals!"

Thus saying, the colonel plunged out of the room, and Mrs. St. Leger took Brenda upstairs. The old lady was delighted at the news of her engagement to Harold, and congratulated and embraced the girl with much effusion, and insisted upon her asking Captain Burton to dine; all of which Brenda received with the best of good grace, notwithstanding that she was in no mood for conversation and longed to be alone. At last Mrs. St. Leger left her.

Then she fell to thinking of the subject which was all the time uppermost in her mind. That last remark of her father's forced itself upon her. Who else was there in Chippingholt who wore crape? Then suddenly it flashed across her mind that Lady Jenny did. Of course, she was in mourning for her father. Then came the colonel's words—She was a good shot!

Trembling all over, she sat down and wrestled with these two facts. They were all significant.

"Could it—could it really be Lady Jenny?" she asked herself.

But to that question she could find no answer.

L. of C.

CHAPTER VIII

BAD NEWS

So Brenda was in London again, and found the great city in an uproar over the possibility of a war in South Africa. Negotiations were constantly passing between England and the Transvaal concerning the franchise for the Uitlanders. History was being manufactured at the rate of a sensation a week; Leyds was weaving his plots and spreading his nets in Europe; while at Pretoria Paul Kruger numbered his burghers, dispensed arms, and intrigued with the President of the Free State. Few believed that a war was inevitable, that a small state of farmers would defy a mighty empire. But there were others who knew from rumors and hints that real strength lay behind the apparent weakness of those two diminutive Republics. Meanwhile zealots like Scarse preached ever the fable of the wolf and the lamb. Chamberlain was the wolf and good Oom Paul the lamb—somewhat overgrown perhaps, but still a lamb.

A pro-Boer meeting was announced to be held in Trafalgar Square, and Scarse was to speak in favor of the honest, God-fearing agriculturists, who, his imagination led him to believe, inhabited Pretoria. He and his following were dead against the war, and asserted that so many were the people of their opinion that only the big square could hold them. So they re-

joiced at the prospect of their convention, which was going to force England into repeating the cowardly policy of the Liberals after Majuba—a policy miscalled magnanimous, and out of which all these present troubles had arisen. In Amsterdam, astute Dr. Leyds rejoiced also on the assumption that a house divided against itself could not stand. His President had provided him with that text, and the mere fact of this mass meeting seemed to prove the force of it.

Meanwhile he scattered money broadcast—Uitlander money—that the honorable Continental Press might yelp and clamor like jackals at the heels of the lion their respective countries dare not attack. It is only just to say that none of Leyds' guineas found their way into Scarse's pocket. If misguided, he was at least honest.

But Brenda took little notice of the question of the day, burning as it was. She concerned herself only with Harold, and had the fate of the Empire been at stake—as it seemed likely to be—she would still have thought of him. Instructed by Aunt Judy, she duly invited him to dinner. He refused on the plea of regimental duty. He would be in town, he said, toward the end of the week. Brenda imagined she could read a nervous fear in every line of his letter. But having no one to consult, she was obliged to wait his coming. He alone could explain much that was mysterious to her.

Meanwhile she resolved to see her father, and ask upon what grounds he suspected Lady Jenny. His hint about the crape referred unmistakably to that lady. And it was true; Lady Jenny had stated very

plainly that she did not love her husband, and that because of his connection with some other woman. But she had said nothing on which Brenda could fasten now even in the light of suspicion; certainly she was in mourning for her father and wore crape usually. And it was probable that she wore it on the night of the murder. She had been out, too, about the hour when it took place. Then there was the fact that she was an accomplished shot; but all this evidence was purely circumstantial, and could in no way bring home the guilt to her. Yet she might have a motive, and Scarse might know that motive, so Brenda sought out her father two or three days after their last interview. Come what would, she intended to force him to speak plainly.

That Harold's name might be cleared from the suspicions cast upon it by Inspector Woke, it was necessary that the guilt should be brought home to the right person. Now Brenda wished to be at rest about her father's connection with the strange man whose existence he denied.

But on the occasion of this second visit to Star Street she was unfortunate. Mr. Scarse was not at home, and the porter of the mansions did not know when he would be in. Brenda went upstairs to wait, and was admitted into the chambers by her father's old servant, a staid ex-butler who had been with him for years. This man brought her some tea, gave her an evening paper, and left her alone in the study. It was between four and five, so that the chances were that Mr. Scarse would soon return. One of his virtues was punctuality.

Leaning back in the deep armchair by her father's everlasting fire—quite superfluous on this warm evening—Brenda sipped her tea and fell to thinking of Harold.

She was physically tired, having been shopping all the morning with her aunt. The warmth of fire and atmosphere soothed her nerves and made her feel drowsy. In a very few minutes she was fast asleep and dreaming of her lover. At least so concluded her father's butler when he peeped in to see if she required anything.

From her slumber Brenda was awakened by the touch of a hand on her shoulder. Then, as she languidly opened her eyes, a man bent over her and kissed her.

"Harold," she murmured, drowsily, "my darling——"

"I win the gloves, Miss Scarse," said a quiet, calm voice. The man stepped back as she sprang to her feet.

"Mr. van Zwieten!" she cried, with a sense of suffocation. "You!"

"I," answered Van Zwieten, removing the lampshade that he might see her more clearly.

Then she realized that she must have been sleeping a long time, for the lamp had not been lit when she sat down.

"You coward!" she panted, with flashing eyes—"you contemptible coward!"

Cool as he was, Van Zwieten winced at the hatred in her voice. But the more she loathed him the more determined he was to make her his wife. He recovered his calmness with a laugh, and stood by the

table masterful and handsome in his smart town dress. No dandy could have been better turned out than the big Dutchman.

"Ach! I have touched the proud lips of little red Schefen," said he, quoting from Heine. "Come, Miss Scarse, when am I to have my gloves?"

"If I were a man I would kill you!"

"In that case—in any case—I am glad you are a woman. Why are you angry? I am only anticipating my right."

"Oh!" cried Brenda, clenching her hands, "will no one deliver me from this man?"

"No one," said Van Zwieten, slowly and determinedly. "You are mine—you always were. That kiss makes you doubly so."

Brenda, seeing it was useless to speak, cast on him one look of scorn and stepped toward the door. Before she reached it he spoke again. What he said made her pause.

"Wait and listen to me, Miss Scarse—for your father's sake. Ah! you are wise. Come, here is a chair. Sit down; we have much to talk about."

"I prefer to stand. Tell me, what do you mean?" she burst out.

"What I say. Listen to me, for your father's sake. Or, if you care so little for him that you can get him into trouble without seeking to avert it, why—the door is open."

In answer to this speech Brenda sat down and looked steadily at the man. He met her gaze frankly, and throughout conducted the interview with his usual politeness. "I know you do not love me," said

he, in his deep voice; "but I love you, and I am content to win your affection after marriage."

"I will never marry you. Take that answer once and for all."

"In that case you leave me free to deal with your father."

"I don't understand you."

"Then I explain—not everything, for I never trust women, not even you. But I know the truth about this murder—so does your father."

Brenda preserved her coolness. "Do you accuse him of the crime?"

"Perhaps," replied Van Zwieten, with a singular smile, "should you not agree to give up Captain Burton and marry me. I know who killed Malet."

"So do I," said Brenda, quietly. "It was the man you saw at the station on the night of the murder."

Van Zwieten smothered an ejaculation of surprise. "What do you know of him?"

"I know that he killed Mr. Malet—that my father shielded him, and sent him away. You dare not accuse my father of the murder."

"You are willing to risk that by refusing to marry me?"

"Yes; you can do your worst."

The Dutchman seemed rather disconcerted. He had not expected to be defied like this.

"I don't want to proceed to extremities, Miss Scarse," he said doubtfully; "but I know much that may damage your father should it become public. And if you do not care for him, there is Burton to be considered. I can get him also into trouble."

"On what grounds?"

"I won't tell you. Ask him yourself. Ask him why he left Chippingholt so suddenly."

Brenda started, for the remark confirmed her suspicions that Harold was troubled in some way about this crime.

"I shall ask him. Have you anything more to say?"

"No; that will do for the present. Only," said Van Zwieten, menacingly, "I give you one last warning. If you marry Captain Burton, he is lost, your father is lost, and you will be a wretched woman all the rest of your days."

Up to the present Brenda had controlled her feelings very well. Now the feminine desire to speak her mind got the upper hand, and she rose to defy he Dutchman.

"You speak very boldly and confidently," she said; "but you do not speak plainly. You hint at my father's guilt, at some link connecting Captain Burton with this crime. I don't believe you have the knowledge you say you possess. I am not to be terrified by vain threats, Mr. van Zwieten—you are not dealing with a child."

"When the time comes, I shall speak out," replied the man, sullenly.

"Speak out now—if you can—if you dare!"

"No. I will do nothing in a hurry. But ask your father—ask Captain Burton—what they did on the night of the murder."

"You villain! I believe you killed the man yourself."

"Oh, certainly," mocked Van Zwieten, "if it pleases you to think so." He took a turn up and down the room, then approached her with a grave smile.

"Miss Scarse," said he, entreatingly, "this is not the wooing I care for. I love you, and I will have you to be my wife, but it is not my desire to gain you by force. Why cannot you accept me? I am a richer man than Captain Burton, and I will make you a better husband. Come with me to the Transvaal, and you know not what height I may raise you to. There will be war—I am certain there will be war. Afterward ——"

"The Transvaal will cease to exist, Mr. van Zwieten."

"By Heaven! not so!" swore the Dutchman, growing red. "Ah, you do not know how we are tricking these English fools. I am Dutch, born in Holland, but I have thrown in my lot with the Boers. I and Leyds and Kruger and Steyn are set upon building up a new nation in South Africa. As the English, a century ago, were driven out of America, so will they be driven from the Cape. They will go to war, thinking it will be an easy task. They do not know—they do not guess—we have more burghers, more arms, more friends than they think. They are less well prepared for war than we are. Wait—wait—all the world will be astonished before the year is out. Brenda, I could say much, but I dare not. Trust me, love me, marry me, and you will be great, even as I shall be great. Come with me and assist me to build up this new nation."

"At the expense of my own country!" cried the

girl. "I would rather die! You are a Boer spy, a Boer liar; but all your intrigues, all your lies, will come to nothing. If there is a war, your Republic will be crushed, and your rebellion punished. Is it to me, a loyal Englishwoman, that you speak? Marry you! Betray my country! I defy your threat. I treat with contempt your boasts of conquest. Let me pass, Mr. van Zwieten. Never dare to speak to me again."

With a vigorous movement she thrust him back, and swept out of the door before he could recover his presence of mind. It was just as well she had gone, for Van Zwieten, baffled and scorned, gave way fully to his rage. He did not dare to follow and make a scandal, lest it should lead to inquiry about him and his doings. But he strode up and down the room, swearing volubly in Dutch and English. Furious with Brenda, furious with himself, he could not contain his anger. He had played his last card, and had lost.

"No matter," he said, with a mighty oath, "I'll make her heart ache yet!" Though how he intended to do this was not clear even to himself.

Van Zwieten was involved in a maze of intrigue; but he was doubtful how to use it to his own advantage. He had ample material to manufacture trouble in connection with this crime, but for want of certain missing links in the chain he was puzzled how to act. To Brenda he had spoken with less than his usual caution. He had been carried away by his feelings. He was madly in love with her, and the more she scorned him, the more he worshipped her. If he could not win her by fair means, he would do so by foul.

Without waiting for the return of Mr. Scarse, he left the chambers to think out some plan whereby he might net Brenda in his toils. As yet he could not see clearly ahead. But in time he might hope to accomplish much that now appeared to be impossible.

Brenda returned to Kensington with a feeling of dread. It was apparent that Van Zwieten knew something detrimental to her father, but she had grave doubts whether he could use his knowledge. He would have used it before, she thought, had it been a weapon of any strength. As to Harold, she could not conjecture what Van Zwieten's threat implied. He certainly had not killed Malet, nor, on the face of it, did he know anything about the matter. She looked forward anxiously to his arrival with the intention of warning him against his enemy. Only if there was perfect confidence between him and herself could they hope to baffle the wicked schemes of the Dutchman.

But Harold seemed to avoid her, and as he had apparently something to conceal, she could not assure herself that he would confide everything to her. In that case Van Zwieten might succeed in implicating him, for she deemed him no match for the Dutchman single-handed.

The days passed, and she counted every hour, anxious for that one which would bring her lover to her arms. At length he came one afternoon. She found him looking pale and haggard as with mental torture. She uttered no word of reproach, but threw herself into his arms. He strained her almost fiercely to his breast and covered her face with kisses. They were

alone in the drawing-room, as Mrs. St. Leger was out shopping and the colonel was holding forth at his club.

For some minutes neither of them spoke. It was Brenda who first broke the silence.

"My darling, how glad I am to see you again," she said, looking tenderly into his dark face. "Oh, why did you leave me so cruelly—so suddenly, at Chippingholt?"

"I thought you'd ask that," replied he, with an effort to appear gay. "Well, dear, it was for two reasons; in the first place, I was recalled suddenly by my colonel, and besides that I had bad news and did not dare to tell you."

"Oh, Harold, as though I could not bear anything for your sake. From whom did you have bad news?"

"From Van Zwieten, strange to say."

She withdrew herself suddenly from her lover's arms, and a feeling of terror came over her. Van Zwieten again—the man seemed to be her evil genius.

"What is the bad news?" she asked faintly.

"Malet gambled away my twenty thousand pounds. I have nothing but my small income!"

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. ST. LEGER IS DISCREET.

"Is that all?" asked Brenda, drawing a breath of relief. "Oh, you stupid boy, did you run away because you were afraid to tell me that?"

Captain Burton stared and drew a breath also—one of amazement. "Well, it's hard to understand a woman," he said, half smiling, half annoyed. "I made sure you'd cry your eyes out when you heard. Don't you understand, Brenda, what it means? If we are to marry at all, it must be on our five hundred a year?"

"And why not?" was her answer. "I am ready if you are, Harold. How *could* you give me all this anxiety for such a trifle? I want you, my dear, not the money. But I thought you must have had some other reason for going away."

"What other reason could I have had?" asked Burton, quickly, and waiting apprehensively for her reply.

"Never mind. I'll tell you later. Only the twenty thousand pounds! Well, after all, I'm not surprised to hear of the loss."

"*I* was very much astonished, and very wretched when I heard it. I can't take the loss of all that money as quietly as you seem to do, Brenda. And not only mine has gone, but Wilfred's too. Forty thousand

pounds, and all his own fortune! Great Scot! the man must have played day and night to get rid of it. What folly for my father to leave it so completely in his power. If there had only been another trustee to pull him up. I don't want to speak evil of the dead," cried Harold, wrathfully, "but I could find it in my heart to curse Malet."

"No, don't, Harold. His terrible death was punishment enough. How was it that Mr. van Zwieten came to know of this?"

"I can't say. He refused to tell me. But he did know, and he tried to make me give you up on that account. Of course I told him—well, never mind what I said—it was strong and to the point. Brenda, we have a dangerous enemy in Van Zwieten."

"I always knew we had. And now that this crime has been committed he is more dangerous than ever."

"How do you know that?" Harold looked anxiously at her.

"He threatened me the other day."

"Threatened you!—the hound! What did he say?"

"He told me, if I did not give you up and marry him, he would get my father into trouble over Mr. Malet's murder."

"Does he suspect your father?"

"Yes, and no. He insists that father was cognizant of the murder, but I think he puts the actual deed down to the man with the crape scarf."

"That may be true. Remember what I found!"

"I remember. I also made a discovery," and

Brenda told him how she had found the crape scarf burning in the grate of her father's study at Chippingholt, how her father had asserted that he was the man seen by Harold, and many other things. Indeed, she told him all she knew, including her conversations with Lady Jenny, with Wilfred, with Van Zwieten and with her father. Chin in hand, Harold listened attentively, putting in a word now and then. When she had finished, he looked utterly perplexed.

"It's all such a muddle I can't get at the rights of it," he said. "No one will speak out straight, and every one seems to have something to hide. Bad as Van Zwieten is, I don't believe he killed Malet. I don't see what motive he could have had."

"Unless, as Wilfred says, it were for political reasons."

"Oh, Wilfred's crazy about politics," replied Harold, testily. "He thinks of nothing else. It is a perfect mania with him. But Van Zwieten would not be such a fool as to risk his neck because Malet took up the cudgels against the Boers. No, Van Zwieten is innocent enough."

"What about Lady Jenny?"

Captain Burton changed color, and commenced to pace up and down the room. "She wouldn't have done it. She is half an Italian, I know, and fearfully passionate, but I think she'd stop short of that. Besides, although she is a jolly good shot, I doubt very much if she could hit a man in the dark like that so square as to kill him outright."

"But remember, Harold, the shot was fired at close quarters."

"I don't believe she'd have had the nerve for that. Of course it's quite possible she may be guilty, but there's not a scrap of evidence against her as far as I can see."

"What about the crape? Lady Jenny wore crape!"

"That doesn't prove that this scrap was torn from her dress. The crape trimmings on that would lie close to the dress; it wouldn't be so easy for a man to make a clutch at them and tear a piece off as at a scarf, with the ends floating freely. My belief is that the morsel of crape was torn from the scarf."

"Well, it was not worn by my father, in spite of what he says."

"No. I dare say that man who left Chippingholt by the late train is the man who fired the shot. But your father knows all about it, Brenda. Otherwise he would not insist that he had worn the scarf, nor would he have burnt it as he did. I think with you that this unknown man is a relative of your father's, and that your father is shielding him to avoid the disgrace of having a criminal in the family."

"Aunt Judy would know him if he is a relative.

"That is very probable; you had better ask her."

"Harold, do you think Van Zwieten knows the truth?"

Captain Burton hesitated. "It would seem so," said he, "but I don't think he is very sure of the truth, or else he would speak out."

"He threatens you, dear."

"I know he does. He threatened me at Chippingholt. Brenda, I don't deny that the man is dangerous, and that he knows more than I like him to know. It

is in his power to harm me, and if I marry you he will do his best against me. But that sha'n't stop us, Brenda. We'll get married and defy him."

Miss Scarse signified her full approval of this course of action; but she saw that her lover was keeping something back.

"Harold, what else did Van Zwieten say to you at Chippingholt?"

"Oh, nothing of any consequence," replied her lover, uneasily.

"My dear!" Brenda slipped her arm round his neck and drew him down on the sofa beside her. "If you love me, you must trust me. If you think me a sensible woman, you must be honest with me. I know you had some other reason for leaving Chippingholt so suddenly—it was not altogether because you were afraid of telling me about the loss of your money. Van Zwieten told me he could get you into trouble, and now you say the same thing. Tell me what hold he has over you?"

"He has no hold over me," whispered Harold. But she saw that his forehead was beaded with perspiration.

"Tell me—tell me?" she repeated.

"Brenda—I cannot—I dare not."

"Then there *is* something?"

Captain Burton cast a glance round the room and nodded. "I am not a coward," he groaned; "I hope I am not a coward, but there are some things which make the bravest man afraid. Van Zwieten is a devil!"

"Does he accuse you of the murder?"

"No, he doesn't go so far as that, and yet—Brenda," he cried, taking her hand and holding it so tightly that she could have screamed, "don't ask me any more; it is not my own secret."

"Has it anything to do with my father?"

"Partly; but you need not be anxious about that. He is in no danger. Leave me to fight it out with Van Zwieten. I shall get the better of him yet. No, no, Brenda, don't ask me any more questions; you cannot help me; I must go through with this matter alone. Trust me if you love me."

"I ask you to do that with me," said Brenda, sadly, "and you refuse."

"I don't refuse. I cannot tell you now; I will tell you when you are my wife. Listen! we must get married quietly."

"Why quietly?"

"Because I am afraid of Van Zwieten. Yes, you may well look astonished. I, who have never known fear before, fear him. He knows too much, and if he plots against me I cannot counterplot him—at all events for the present. We must marry!"

"When and where you please, darling."

"You trust me?"

"Yes, on the understanding that when I am your wife you tell me everything—everything!"

Burton nodded again. "I will tell you before if I can, Brenda. It is good of you, and like your dear self, to trust me. We can be married at St. Chad's, at Brighton. I'll get a special license. Down there we shall be free from interference by Van Zwieten."

"He would not dare ——"

"Oh, yes, he would—if he knew. He would take some means of preventing our marriage."

"And you would let him do that?"

"I—I might, and I might not." Captain Burton sighed wearily. "If it were only myself I would not mind, but—but there are others whom I *must* consider."

"Harold, you are shielding some one!"

"Yes—no. Brenda, dearest, for Heaven's sake don't question me."

She was perplexed by his indecision—annoyed by his reticence. But she had given her promise, and she would abide by it. "You will not let me help you?" she said plaintively.

"You cannot help me, dear; I must go through with this matter alone—unaided."

"But I can help you," she insisted. "Van Zwieten is our enemy. Well, then, Lady Jenny can help me to crush him."

He started nervously. "What are you saying? Lady Jenny can do nothing."

"Indeed she can, Harold. She told me that if Van Zwieten ever proved troublesome I was to see her, and that she would thwart him."

Harold made no reply, but looked more than ever puzzled and perplexed. Then a light broke in upon Brenda.

"Harold! it is Lady Jenny herself you are shielding?"

"I won't—I cannot tell you," he replied desperately. "Brenda, I'll see Lady Jenny myself at once. If she knows anything about Van Zwieten, I may be able to make use of her knowledge. Come, say good-bye."

"When shall I see you again?"

"In three or four days. Promise me, Brenda, you won't see Jenny until I do."

"I promise. But if you fail with her, then I must see her."

"Yes, if I fail, but I won't fail. You have put a weapon into my hand. After I have seen her, I will tell you the whole miserable business. We will get the better of Van Zwieten yet, my darling."

Captain Burton was picking up his spirits. He went away in a more cheerful frame of mind. Brenda felt certain that his refusal to speak was in the interest of Lady Jenny. Could she have fired the shot? But that seemed impossible. If she herself were guilty, how could she silence and thwart Van Zwieten, who appeared to know so much about the crime? What with her father's denials, Harold's silence, and Van Zwieten's threats, Brenda was quite bewildered. What would be the outcome of it all? she wondered.

Having promised Harold not to see Lady Jenny, Miss Scarse cast about in her mind as to who else could assist her in thwarting Van Zwieten. From her father no help could be obtained. He was wholly on the Dutchman's side, and, it would appear, under his thumb. Then she thought of Wilfred and his openly-expressed hatred of Van Zwieten. Could she not make use of that? In the present state of popular feeling a Boer spy would have a bad time if found in London. If Wilfred could discover that Van Zwieten really was on the Secret Service Staff of the Transvaal, he could force the Dutchman to leave England under threat of denouncing him to the authorities.

No sooner had she come to this conclusion than she acted upon it, and wrote a note to Wilfred's London address asking him to call. Having posted it, she returned to the drawing-room to make tea for Aunt Judy, who had just got back from her shopping. The colonel was still absent, so the two ladies settled themselves down to the discussion of chiffons. If there was one thing Mrs. St. Leger was fond of it was dress. As for Brenda, her mind was too much preoccupied with her own troubles to care much for fashions or bargains. But strive as she might to hide her indifference, it did not take her aunt long to see that her interest was assumed. But that she put down to her lover's visit.

"Why didn't he stay to tea?" she asked, putting away her purchases.

"Because he had to get back to Aldershot," replied Brenda, pouring out the tea. "They are very busy down there."

"Oh, Brenda, do you think there will be war? How glad I am that William has retired."

"That is not the speech of a true soldier's wife, Aunt Judy."

"My dear, it's all very well talking," replied Mrs. St. Leger, testily, "but you don't know what war is. I don't mean these little frontier skirmishes, but a real war—that is truly terrible. I remember the Crimea."

"I don't think this will be so bad, auntie. The Transvaal is not Russia."

"All the same I fancy they are better prepared than we think. William says so. He has heard all kinds of rumors at the club. Well, if it's got to be it's got

to be. You will have to lose your Harold for a time, dear."

"In a good hour be it spoken," cried Brenda, hastily, to avert the omen. "Don't say I'll lose him, aunt. Of course he will go to the front; but don't speak of losing him."

"Well, you never know, my dear. Oh, Brenda, I do wish your father were not going to speak at this mass meeting. There is sure to be trouble."

"I don't think he'll mind that," said the girl. "My father and those who think with him are doing all they can to bring about the war by confirming Kruger in his obstinacy."

"Stuart always was wrong-headed and obstinate," sighed Mrs. St. Leger. "I'm sure I tremble when he comes here. William and he do nothing but wrangle."

"Aunt Judy," said Brenda, thinking the present a good opportunity, "do you know I am deplorably ignorant about my family?"

"Ignorant, my dear? how do you mean? Your mother, I know, was a sweet woman, and died all too young. If she had only lived Stuart might have been very different."

"I was thinking more of my father, aunt. Is he your only brother?"

Mrs. St. Leger almost dropped her cup. She looked scared and her face blanched. "Why do you ask me that, Brenda?" she asked in a faltering voice.

"Because I have seen a man so like my father as to make me think he must be some relative—possibly a brother."

"Where did you see him?"

"At Chippingholt. Aunt Judy, tell me, who is he?"

Mrs. St. Leger recovered herself. "My dear Brenda, how should I know who the man is? You have been misled probably by a chance resemblance."

"The resemblance was too strongly marked to be mere chance. And my father——" Brenda checked herself. "Auntie, surely you can answer a simple question?"

"What is it you want to know?" asked the old lady, nervously.

"Have you two brothers?"

"No. Your father is my only brother," said Mrs. St. Leger, but by the way in which she said it Brenda knew that she spoke falsely.

CHAPTER X.

THE MASS MEETING.

THE better day, the better deed. Acting on the advice of this proverb, those responsible for the pro-Boer meeting convened it on a Sunday, that all those engaged on other days in earning their bread might attend. And so far as numbers went, the crowded state of Trafalgar Square seemed to justify this course. Nelson's Column soared from a dense mass of people, which even overflowed into the streets approaching the great open space. On all sides the windows were filled with curious spectators, who, apprehensive all the while of trouble, gazed forth expectantly over the sea of heads below. But they need have had no fear. The mob was on its best behavior—good-natured and roughly jocular as an English crowd ever is—amenable to law and order, and ever ready to be controlled by the police.

Platforms for the convenience of the orators had been erected round the grand column—the symbol of an Empire which these well-meaning busybodies were so anxious to dismember and destroy. Below, crowded laborers, artisans, shopkeepers, traders of all kinds; and on the fringe of the mob, hard by the National Gallery, were lines of hansom cabs, surmounted by clubmen from Pall Mall and St. James' Street who had come to see the fun. There were plenty of women, bringing

with them their children, when they could not leave them at home, and a sprinkling of redcoats and blue-jackets. These, as the visible symbol of England's fighting power, were idolized by the mob. For, alas for Mr. Scarse and his supporters, the voice of the people was dead against their philanthropic efforts. Instead of the Boer National Anthem, "God Save the Queen" and "Rule Britannia" were being sung. The Little Englanders were doing their best to laud Kruger and damn their own Government; but the temper of the mob was all the other way. In a word, the Imperialists were in the majority.

On the parapet, near the National Gallery, Brenda, very plainly dressed, was holding on to Wilfred's arm. He had been lunching at Mrs. St. Leger's, and afterward Brenda had persuaded him to escort her to the meeting. She feared for the safety of her father, and dreaded lest his speech should draw on him the anger of the mob. The colonel had declined to come, swearing in true military style that he would attend no meeting meant to belittle England.

"Is Mr. van Zwieten here?" asked Brenda, looking over the sea of heads.

"I don't think so," replied Wilfred, whose pale face was flushed with excitement. "He is too clever to sympathize openly with the cause he advocates. No! his task is to condemn the Boers in public and to support them in private."

"Have you found out anything about him, Wilfred?"

"Yes. He lives ostensibly in Duke Street, St. James; but he has other rooms in Westminster, where he passes

under another name. There he receives all kinds of queer people—especially at night."

"Spies?" asked Brenda, so low as not to be heard by those near her.

"I believe so. He calls himself Jones, and a good many spies go up to see Mr. Jones. The scoundrel! To plot treason almost in the shadow of the Clock Tower! But I do not blame him so much as those who are betraying their country. After all, Van Zwieten is a foreigner, and naturally hates us; but there are Englishmen, Brenda—Englishmen born and bred—who are selling secrets for Transvaal gold. I'd hang the lot if I could!"

"Hush, Wilfred, don't speak so loud. Can you prove that Van Zwieten is a spy?"

"Not yet; but I have a plan in my head to trap him."

"He will not be easily trapped."

"No; he is a cunning beast, but I'll get the better of him yet. When I tear his mask off he'll be forced to leave London. Hullo! there's your father!"

Brenda turned pale as that familiar lean figure appeared on the platform. He was saluted with a groan. Several Union Jacks were waved defiantly in his face, and a few bars of "God Save the Queen" were sung with lusty strength. A small knot of people stood round him. Taking off his hat, he advanced to the edge of the platform. A few expressions, such as "God-fearing farmers," "greedy capitalists," "the Jingoism of Chamberlain," "the treachery of Rhodes," caught Brenda's ear, and then her father's voice was drowned in a roar of cheering and singing. In vain

did Mr. Scarse hold up his hand for silence; in reply he was assailed with insults, and a lifeguardsman was shouldered and passed along the heads of the crowd, a red spot of color amid the neutral tints. Union Jacks were waved, "Rule Britannia" was sung. Many a groan was there for Kruger; many a cheer for "Joe"; and the close-locked crowd, maddened by the sound of its own voice, rolled and swung like a stormy sea.

"Pore thing! pore thing!" said an old woman near Brenda, "I 'ope they won't chuck him into the fountings."

"Oh, Wilfred!" gasped the girl, terrified for her father's safety.

But the suggestion met with the approval of the crowd, and passed from mouth to mouth until it reached those immediately under the fountain. A roar went up to the sky, and several enthusiasts endeavored to clamber up the platform. The police beat them back, and order was restored for the moment. Then, as an appeal to the chivalry of the mob, a grim-looking female with a black bag came forward to speak. She commenced a highly abusive harangue, but it was drowned in laughter and a recommendation, in terms purely colloquial, that she should go home and tend any young offspring she might chance to have. The pro-Boers began to look disconsolate. Each effort they made to speak was abortive. A sailor jumped on the parapet opposite Morley's Hotel and waved a Union Jack. The mob saw and cheered, and roared out the National Anthem. Some threw apples and oranges at the orators on the platform, who promptly dodged behind the Column and endeavored

to obtain a hearing on the other side, but with even less success.

On losing sight of her father, Brenda wanted to try and follow him; and Wilfred, the patriot, although he hated Scarse, and would gladly have seen him ducked, could not but sympathize with the girl's anxiety. So, extricating themselves from the crowd, they struggled downward toward the lower part of the square. There a knot of talkers attracted their attention.

"Wot I say is, Why does Rhodes want to fight a lot of 'ard-working coves like them Boers?" said one begrimed ruffian. "They're the same as us, ain't they?"

"No, they ain't," grunted his neighbor. "They won't give Englishmen votes, an' we made their bloomin' country, we did."

"I 'old by Gladstone, I tell you——"

"Garn! you and your Gladstone; he'd ha' given away Windsor Castle if he cud."

"Ho! Wot price Majuba!"

"Ah! we must wipe out that disgrace," said a clearer and apparently more highly-educated speaker.

Then the fun began. Some abused Gladstone as the cause of all the trouble, others made extensive demands upon their vocabulary for a due definition of Mr. Chamberlain. It speedily became apparent that none of them knew what they were talking about. Wilfred laughed, and the begrimed one straightway resented his laughter.

"We don't want no tall 'ats 'ere," he yelped.

"No, you want sense," retorted Burton. But, unwilling to involve Brenda in a row, he pushed on.

As they passed away they heard a scuffle, and looked back to see that the dirty man had at last his heart's desire, so far as to have found an antagonist. But even thus early in the game he was getting the worst of it. At length, having apparently had enough, he gave forth a lusty yell for "police," and was duly rescued in a battered condition, and still arguing. Brenda felt anxious. The mob all round was showing signs of restiveness.

In another part of the square some pro-Boer orators spoke with more chance of a hearing. They drew the usual picture of a small toiling community, of unscrupulous capitalists, the worship of gold, the rights of the Boers to arrange affairs in their own house, and the iniquity of a mighty Empire crushing a diminutive State, wholly unable to defend itself.

Furious at the falsehoods which he heard all around him, Wilfred lost his head altogether, and, despite all Brenda's entreaty, got up on the parapet and raised his voice.

"Lies, lies! all lies, I say. All that we demand are equal rights for the white man and kindly treatment of the black. The Boer is a brutal bully. He beats the black man, and treats him like a dog. Kruger and his gang have accumulated millions through the industry of those to whom they refuse the franchise. It is they who want war, not England; and if we refuse their challenge, then will they try to drive us out of Africa. It is not the Transvaal Republic which is in danger, but the Empire. Continental Powers, who hate us, are urging these misguided people to do what they dare not do themselves, hoping to profit

took place. At length the police, as in the former by their folly and attack us when we are hampered in South Africa. Don't believe these liars, men! They betray their own country, and a good half of them are paid with Transvaal gold for doing so. Spies! Traitors, all of them. Duck them here in the fountains."

Then, having thus relieved his feelings, Wilfred took the girl's hand and pushed on hurriedly; and soon they were lost to view in the crowd.

But the effect of his words was immediate. The pro-Boer champions, trying to make good their cause, were not allowed speech. As quickly as they opened their mouths the mob shouted them down. Some ugly rushes were made in their direction, and they were hustled roughly. A couple of men and women, beginning to see they were in danger of being chucked, shouted for the police of the very Government they had been abusing. A body of constables forced itself through the crowd and formed a cordon round these political martyrs. They were escorted to the fringe of the mob, looking pale and nervous—anything, in fact, but heroic. And the language with which they were saluted was not such as need be set down here.

Meanwhile their friends at the Column were faring badly enough. The police began to see that the temper of the mob was rising, and insisted that the speaking—or rather the attempts to speak—should stop. The orators refused, and stuck to their platform; they were driven off from one side and they climbed up the other. Missiles began to fly, the crowd to growl, and some rough-and-tumble fights

case, marched them away down Northumberland Avenue. The crowd which followed was so excited that the martyrs, afraid of the storm which, by their own folly, they had raised, tried to enter one of the hotels. But the porters here were prepared, and drove them back, and the wretched creatures—Scarse amongst them—were beaten to and fro like tennis balls. Finally, they managed to gain the shelter of a clubhouse, where they held an indignation meeting on their own account. But nothing on earth and above it would have convinced them that they had got just what they deserved.

Brenda was in a great state of alarm for her father. But Wilfred consoled her as well as he could. "He will be all right," he said cheerfully; "the police will look after him."

"He may be hurt."

"He should have thought of that before he played the fool. But he will not be hurt; those sort of people never are. I beg your pardon, Brenda. After all, he is your father."

"He honestly believes in the Boers, Wilfred."

"I know he does. He'd find out his mistake if he went to live amongst them. I wish I could have had half an hour at them, Brenda," he said, with sparkling eyes. "I would have done but for you."

"You said quite enough, Wilfred. I was afraid the police would arrest you."

"Arrest me! Come, that's good, seeing I spoke for the Government. What about your father and his wretched friends who are abusing their own country?"

"There are two sides to every question."

"Not to this one," replied Wilfred, who was easily excited on the subject.

Brenda decided that it was best not to contradict him. He was so highly strung that in moments of this kind he was not altogether accountable either for his speech or actions. He would flash into a rage on the slightest provocation, and contradict every one around him, like some hysterical woman. No doctor could call him insane, since he knew well how to conduct himself, and was not the prey of any hallucination. But his brain was delicately balanced, and worry or persistent irritation brought him very near the borders of insanity. For this reason he led a quiet life, and saw but few people. The magnitude and whirl of London always overwrought him, and Brenda regretted now that she had argued with him at all.

"Have it your own way, Wilfred," she said, taking his arm. "But I hope my father is safe. I have seen enough, so you might take me home."

"All right. Don't be angry with me, Brenda. But the silly views your father takes annoy me."

"I am not angry with you, Wilfred. Come along; let's get back now."

"About time too," said he. "The whole thing's a farce."

"Ah! I agree with you there, Mr. Burton," said a voice, and Brenda turned with a start to find Van Zwieten at her elbow. "How are you, Miss Scarse?" he asked quietly, as though nothing unusual had passed between them at their last meeting. "And what do you think of this silly business?"

"I think it just what you call it—silly," replied Brenda, coldly. "But I did not expect to hear you say so."

"You ought to be pleased that your friends are fighting your battles," said Wilfred.

Van Zwieten flicked a grain of dust from off his frock coat and raised his eyebrows. "My friends!" he repeated. "Oh, none of those who spoke are my friends, unless you refer to Mr. Scarse. But of course I don't agree with his views. I am an Imperialist," he said smoothly.

Remembering the disclosures he had made to her, Brenda was astounded at the effrontery of the man; but Wilfred understood.

"Of course you are an Imperialist," he said; "it pays better!"

"Quite so," assented Van Zwieten; "it pays better—much better. But you talk in riddles."

"Do I? I think you can guess them then," retorted Wilfred, "and I don't think you will find Oom Paul will benefit by this meeting. It will show him how very much of one mind the English people are, and how they are determined to teach him a lesson."

"Oh, a lesson, eh?" Van Zwieten laughed. "It is to be hoped Oom Paul will prove an apt pupil; but I fear he is too old to learn."

"And Leyds—is he too old? He pulls the strings!"

"What strings?" asked the Dutchman, blankly.

"The strings to make you dance!"

In spite of Van Zwieten's command of his temper,

Wilfred was making him angry. This of itself Brenda did not mind in the least; but she did mind a quarrel, and toward that she could see these two were fast drifting. Moreover, owing to the raised tones of Wilfred's voice, a crowd was collecting. Mr. van Zwieten did not look altogether comfortable. He despised Wilfred as a mere boy; but even so, boy or not, this young fellow, with his fearless nature and frantic patriotism, might put highly undesirable notions into the heads of those around. And most of them were more or less inflammable just then. The fountains, too, were close at hand.

"Come along, Wilfred," said Brenda. "Do let us get home."

But before he could reply, a hubbub arose amid the crowd not far distant, and they turned in that direction. From out the jeers and laughter an angry voice could be heard holding forth in abuse of the Government and in praise of the Boers.

Then the crowd parted, surged along, and Brenda saw advancing a tall, thin man. He wore a snuff-colored coat, and a yard or so of crape wrapped round his throat like a scarf. And his face—how like it was to that of her father!

"Oh!" she cried, grasping Wilfred's arm, "that is the man who——"

"Hush!" Van Zwieten whispered fiercely. "Don't accuse him in public!"

CHAPTER XI.

A STARTLING DISCOVERY.

In her anxiety to solve the mystery which surrounded this man, so like her father, Brenda would, but for the publicity of the position, have rushed forward and questioned him. Moreover, he began at once to speak loudly in abuse of the Government and in defence of the Boer Republic.

"It is the capitalists who want this war," he cried excitedly; "Rhodes and Beit and all that gang of scoundrels. Chamberlain is merely playing into their hands. Their villainous scheme is to take the gold mines from these unoffending people, and they are prepared to massacre them in their greed for gold. Kruger is ——"

"Shut your mouth!" shouted a big, scowling man, thrusting himself forward. "We'll make you if you don't."

"I'm not afraid—I'm ready to stand by the truth," screeched the man with the crape scarf. "I mourn for England—the victim of a corrupt set of time-serving scoundrels. I wear black for her. Woe to her, I say, and her greed for gold—woe to her vile Government ——"

With a fierce growl the mob flung forward. Brenda cried out. It was as though her father himself were

being attacked. With a bound she placed herself before the old man.

"Leave him! Don't touch him!" she cried. "He's mad!"

"I'm not mad," cried the man. "I protest against tyranny and the cursed greed that would destroy a nation. You crouch at the feet of those who will drain your blood—cowardly hounds all of you!"

"'Ere! Let me get at 'im. Stand away, laidy!"

"No, no, he is old and weak. Oh, Mr. van Zwieten, save him."

Seeing an opportunity of posing as a hero at a small cost, the Dutchman placed the old man behind him, and stood between him and the mob which was closing in. "Leave him to me—I'll see to him!"

"He's a furriner!" yelped a small man. "Hit his head!"

"I'm a naturalized Englishman," shouted Van Zwieten, "but I won't let you touch this man!"

"Woe—woe to the wicked Government who are about to dye their garments in the blood of a just people!" shrieked the old man, waving his arms wildly.

Then Wilfred took hold of him and hurried him away. "Hold your tongue," he said roughly. "You'll get into trouble."

"I will seal my protest with my blood!"

"Stand back!" shouted Van Zwieten, opposing those who would have followed. "Hi, constable!"

"Why, it's Van the cricketer," cried the big man, joyfully. "He's all right, boys. Seen 'im carry 'is bat out many a time, I 'ave."

"Hooray for Van!" roared the fickle crowd, and as

half-a-dozen policemen were pushing their way toward the centre of disturbance, it veered round to cheering Van Zwieten.

"Spy! Spy! He's a spy!" shouted a voice that sounded to Brenda uncommonly like Wilfred's.

The crowd growled again, and darted forward. But the police were now pushing right and left. Van Zwieten, who had changed color at the cry, stepped back and was swallowed up by the concourse of people. Wilfred had let the old man go, and the zealot was again raging, waving his crape scarf like a banner.

Brenda, terrified at finding herself alone in the midst of the mob, kept close to the big Dutchman.

Suddenly Wilfred, appearing, as it were, from nowhere, caught her arm.

"Come away! come away! There may be trouble," he cried, drawing her aside on to the steps by St. Martin's Church. Afar off she could see Van Zwieten leading the old man down a side street, and the little band of constables fighting with the mob, who were now inclined to resent any interference. Brenda was in despair.

"I want to ask that old man who he is," she cried. But Wilfred held her back in spite of her efforts to follow the Dutchman.

"Brenda! don't be foolish. It's dangerous. The people are getting their blood up."

"But that old man killed Mr. Malet. I *will* know who he is."

"Van Zwieten will find out."

"I dare say," said Brenda, tartly. "But he won't tell you or me."

"It's too late now to think of that. Come up here, and let us get a hansom. If you got into trouble, Brenda, Harold would never forgive me!"

And Brenda knew that this was so, and she guessed too that Wilfred was chafing under his responsibility for her safety. She therefore stepped into a hansom with him. When they were rattling along Piccadilly she asked him if it was he who had called out that Van Zwieten was a spy.

"Yes, it was I," admitted Wilfred, in a fiery tone. "And I should have liked to see the crowd go for the big brute."

"I don't like Van Zwieten myself, as you know," Brenda said; "all the same, Wilfred, it is only fair to say he behaved very well over that old man."

"He knew there was no danger, that the police were about. He wanted to show up as a hero in your eyes, Brenda. For my part, I wish he had been lynched for a spy. I hate the man."

"People don't lynch now in England, Wilfred."

"They would have done it to-day on small encouragement. It was lucky for Van Zwieten that he is a popular cricketer, and that they recognized him as such. Otherwise he would not have got off so easily. But I'll catch him yet!"

"How you do hate him, Wilfred!"

"Hate him! Of course I do. Here he is accepting the hospitality of England, and spying out all our weak points to use them against us should there be a war. I suspected him long ago from some words he let fall, and I have kept a watch on him ever since. He has haunted Woolwich, Portsmouth and Erith, and has

made friends with privates and officers alike, and he has half a hundred creatures at his beck and call, who are poking and prying about. I dare say out at Pretoria they know more about England and her resources than those here whose duty and business it is. They will await the right moment, then they'll strike; and unless I'm much mistaken they'll strike pretty hard."

"But we are not unprepared, Wilfred."

The young man shook his head gloomily. "I myself have talked with many of our officers," he said, "and we are not so well armed as we should be. Since the Crimea, we have had no big war; and the number of easy victories we have had have made us over-confident. Of the valor of Englishmen I have no fear. They can fight as their fathers fought with true bulldog courage. But nowadays science as well as grit is needed for victory, and our War Office is so sleepy and tied up with red tape that it doesn't keep our armaments up to the mark as it should do. The Boers are armed with the Mauser rifle. Our troops—but there is no need to talk technically to you, Brenda. I can only say that if we have a war, it won't be the military promenade to Pretoria that many people expect it to be."

"But the Transvaal is quite a small state, Wilfred."

"I know. Still it is more than probable that the Orange Free State will join them. Also all over Cape Colony and Natal there are hordes of disloyal Dutch ready to rise at the first chance. Besides, Leyds is stirring up the Continent against us, and here Van Zwieten is gathering information and sending it in cypher to Pretoria. Oh, there's trouble ahead, Brenda.

The Uitlander business is only a pretext for war. If we don't proclaim war, Kruger and Steyn will."

"Let them. We will crush them and punish them."

"I should think so," cried Wilfred, his dark eyes blazing with fervor. "I have never any fear for England. Though the world were against her, she would conquer—all the world was against her at the end of the last century. But we shall have our Waterloo over again. God bless England!"

"If there were war, Wilfred, would you go out?"

"As a newspaper correspondent," he replied. "I have made all my arrangements with *The Morning Planet.* Oh, yes, I'll go to the front, and if I die it will be for our country. Harold of course will go."

"I am proud that he should—yes, even though he should never return—and he is all in all to me!"

"He could have no nobler death," said Wilfred, coldly.

"Oh, but it would be terrible, Wilfred—terrible. Remember I am only a woman; and it takes a great deal of courage——"

"You are an Englishwoman, and Englishwomen are always bravest when there is danger at hand. Don't cry, Brenda. I should not talk like this. My feelings carry me away. Let me be quiet for a time, or Mrs. St. Leger will be alarmed if I arrive in such a state of excitement."

Not another word would he speak on the way to Kensington, but he curled himself up in the corner of the cab, his eyes feverishly bright, and his face pale with emotion. The patriotic fire which consumed him was wearing out his frail body. Brenda could not un-

derstand this "man with one idea." Her love for her country was great, but it was not to her the one devouring passion. To Wilfred England was as a well-beloved woman—a creature of flesh and blood. Every blow levelled at her made him quiver and turn pale. For her sake he would willingly have died. He hated the Continental nations, but most of all he hated Van Zwieten, who was working darkly for her ill. If war were proclaimed, Wilfred promised himself that he would be in the fighting. Van Zwieten, who was no coward, would be there also, and if perchance they met, why England would be revenged if he had to shed his life blood to avenge her. He changed his mind about calling on Mrs. St. Leger, and kept the cab waiting while he said good-bye to Brenda at the door.

"If you find out anything about Van Zwieten, you'll let me know?" she entreated, as they shook hands.

"Yes; but I may be a week or two preparing my plans. He is so infernally clever, that it will take a lot to trap him. But why are you so anxious to know about him, Brenda?"

"He means harm to Harold."

"Nonsense. This isn't the Dark Age. He is powerless to hurt Harold."

"I'm afraid he can, Wilfred! On the night of Mr. Malet's murder Harold was out of doors. Mr. van Zwieten has more than hinted to me that he can and will accuse him of it!"

An angry fire glittered in Wilfred's eye. "I'll soon put a stop to that," he said between his teeth. "If I can prove Van Zwieten is a spy, he will have enough

to do to look after himself without troubling about other people."

"I'm sure of that. And, Wilfred—see if you can find my father; and tell him to come and see me. I am so anxious about him."

"Oh, he's all right." Wilfred really could not bring himself to be sorry for Mr. Scarse, tainted as he was with the heresy of Little England.

"I'll call at his rooms, Brenda, and leave a message if you like. But I can't see him; I might be tempted to tell him my mind. Good-bye."

He jumped into the cab so as to give Brenda no opportunity for further argument. It was natural that she should be anxious about her father. But for her, indeed, he would have rejoiced had the mob succeeded in ducking Mr. Scarse. Bad as was Van Zwieten, Mr. Scarse was, to his thinking, worse, for he was betraying his own country with his rotten politics. It was strange and inconceivable to Wilfred that a man born an Englishman should bring himself to abuse and condemn the very land he should have been proud of.

Strangely enough, he met the object of his thoughts as his cab turned into Star Street. The old man, looking ill and unhappy, was stealing homeward, his eyes fixed on the ground before him. Wilfred was pleased to see that the failure of the meeting had gone home to him. He only hoped he would keep the memory of it by him for future guidance. The cab pulled up with a jerk, and he leaned out.

"Mr. Scarse, can I speak with you?"

Scarse looked up irritably, and recognizing Wilfred,

came to the edge of the pavement. He knew the young man's passion for politics, and looked but sourly upon him.

"What is it?"

"Brenda thinks you might have got into trouble, and is anxious to hear that you are safe. Please send her word."

"Thank you," said Mr. Scarse, loftily, "there is no cause for alarm. I will attend to the matter. Were you at the meeting to-day?"

"I was," retorted Wilfred, shortly, "and I was glad to see it was a failure. Drive on, cabby," and before the older man had recovered from his anger, the hansom was swinging round the corner.

"Rude young man," muttered Mr. Scarse, wearily mounting the steps to his chambers. "Never shall I consent to Brenda marrying his brother!"

In his study he poured himself out a glass of brandy. The events of the afternoon had tried him severely, and he looked older and more frail than ever. He was deeply mortified by the discovery that the popular feeling was all against the Boers, and he recognized that war was certain. Still he hoped that if England were the one to proclaim it Europe might intervene, and for his own part resolved to throw all possible obstacles in the way. Scarse was a true patriot. He could not have loved England more had he been born a German or a Frenchman!

He lay down for an hour. The sleep refreshed him, and he awoke with a clearer brain. On returning to his study he set about writing a letter to the Press, alleging that the failure of the meeting was due to a

Jingoistic conspiracy. While engaged on this precious epistle, Van Zwieten was announced, and Mr. Scarse came forward with outstretched hands.

"Ah, my dear fellow! I am so glad to see you. What a terrible afternoon it has been! A conspiracy, Van Zwieten—a conspiracy! The voice of the people has been stifled, my dear friend."

"It didn't sound like it this afternoon," said the Dutchman, drily. "They all called for war. Well, if they want it, they shall have it. And won't they be sorry when they get it."

"No war—no war. I shall protest ——"

"Oh, your protests won't do any good," said the other, rudely; "the tide runs too strong for you to drive it back with a mop. But I didn't come here to talk politics, Mr. Scarse."

"In that case I must ask you to go." Mr. Scarse was offended. "I have much to do."

"You will have to lay it by then for the time being. I called to tell you that I met a friend of yours to-day —yes, at the meeting."

"Who?"

"That is what I want to hear from your lips. I know who he is from his own. He wears a yellow coat and a crape scarf."

Mr. Scarse's face became grey, and he fell against the wall with staring eyes and extended hands. "I don't know him—I assure you I don't!" he said hoarsely.

"I think you do. He is the man who was in your study at Chippingholt on the night of the murder—the man whom you sent away by train. In a word, Mr. Scarse, he is your brother—your twin brother!"

CHAPTER XII.

A STORY OF THE PAST.

THE old man sprang up with the light of fury in his pale eyes and flung himself on Van Zwieten. For an instant he was more than a match for the big Dutchman.

"How dare you—I have no brother," he gasped. Then as suddenly this strength, born of anger, went out of him, and he became weak as a child. Van Zwieten picked him up like a baby and flung him roughly into a chair.

"Sit there," he said sternly. "I mean to know the whole of this story," and he busied himself lighting the lamp.

"There is—no—no story."

"There is, and, what's more, you will tell it to me."

"I won't," cried Mr. Scarse, shivering and forgetting his previous denial. "You can't force me to speak."

"I can—I will," said the Dutchman, grimly. Then, the lamp being lighted, he sat down in an armchair on the other side of the fireplace opposite to his host and produced a cigar. "Begin, please."

Scarse staggered to his feet—he was shaken by his own nerves and Van Zwieten's rough treatment—and moved slowly toward the door. The Dutchman rose and ran past him with a lightness and speed surpris-

ing in so heavy a man. He reached the door before Mr. Scarse did. The next moment it was locked and the key in Van Zwieten's pocket. "Go back to your seat, please," said Van Zwieten, politely.

"I won't—I am master here," cried the old man, his voice shrill with anger. "What do you mean by treating me like this? I'll call the police."

The Dutchman pulled out the key and held it toward Scarse. "As you please," he said with a sneer. "Call the police and I'll give you in charge."

"Give me in charge, you villain!—for what?"

"For murdering Gilbert Malet. Aha, my dear friend, you did not count on my knowing that, did you? You are quite unaware that I followed you from your cottage into the orchards, where you——"

"I did not—I did not!" wailed Scarse, shrinking back.

"No, you did not," retorted Van Zwieten, "but you were near the spot where Malet was killed, and near it about the time he was shot. You will find it difficult to refute my evidence if I am compelled to give it. On the whole, Mr. Stuart Scarse, I think you had better sit down and talk sensibly."

Scarse glared like an angry cat. But physically and morally the Dutchman was too much for him. With an attempt at dignity he returned to his seat.

"I am at a loss to understand this extraordinary behavior, Mr. Van Zwieten," he said, in his most stately manner, "and I deny the shameful accusation you have made. Perhaps you will be kind enough to apologize and leave my rooms."

"My dear friend, I shall do neither." Van Zwieten

carefully lighted his cigar. "I am waiting to hear the story."

"What story?" asked the other, willfully misunderstanding.

"The story about your brother and his visit to Chippingholt—to murder our dear friend. I know some of it from your brother, but——"

"I have no brother, I tell you!"

"Oh, yes, I think so. A twin brother named—Robert—Robert Scarse."

"He is dead to me."

"Ah, that is quite another thing. He has come to life for the purpose of throwing some light on this mystery. Indeed, I think you had better tell me why he murdered Gilbert Malet."

"He did not murder him."

"Oh, yes, he did; and I should like to have details, please—his motive and all that."

"I refuse to give them to you."

Van Zwieten rose and buttoned his coat. "Very good," said he; "then I shall see a magistrate and tell him all I know."

"What do you know?"

"Sufficient to have Robert arrested for the murder, and you as his accomplice."

Mr. Scarse shivered again, and bit his lip. Then he seemed to make up his mind.

"Sit down. Don't be in a hurry. I will tell you all I can. Of course you will keep secret what I tell you."

"Of course! I never talk without good reason. So you have a twin brother?"

"Yes; Robert. He is—he—he is not in his right mind."

"So I should think from his talk and his extraordinary apparel. A black crape scarf is quite original. By the way, your daughter saw him to-day."

"Brenda?" cried Scarse, horrified. "Then she knows——"

"Nothing—except that Robert is wonderfully like you. I got him away before she could speak to him. This I did for your sake—and my own!"

"You wish to make quite sure of getting Brenda—to force me!"

"Not exactly that," smiled Van Zwieten, "since I know that you are already quite willing she should marry me. But I wish to use the knowledge to force her into giving up Burton and becoming my wife."

"You would tell her of Robert's existence?"

"Not if I could help myself," said the Dutchman, politely. "Believe me, my dear friend, I am very discreet. You can safely confide in me."

"It seems I am forced to," grumbled Mr. Scarse, ungraciously. "What is it you particularly wish to know?"

"The whole story about your brother, and why you deny him. I am sure it will be most interesting. Go on, please, I am waiting."

Mr. Scarse looked at his tyrant savagely. He would dearly have liked to refuse, but he realized that he was on perilous ground. Van Zwieten knew just enough to be dangerous. He must not be allowed to make use of his knowledge, even if he had to be told more. Besides, Mr. Scarse was satisfied that for Brenda's sake

he would keep quiet. Therefore he made a virtue of necessity and launched at once into a family history, of which in no other circumstances would he have spoken to any living soul. It was the very fact of the Dutchman's having it in his power to force his confidence that angered him. No man likes to be coerced.

"I don't think the story will interest you much," he said, sulkily; "but such as it is, I will relate it. Robert Scarse is my twin brother, and is as like me as it is possible for one man to be like another. His appearance deceived young Burton and the Chippingholt folk."

"I know they took him for you. And on account of that scarf they paid you the compliment of thinking you were out of your mind."

Mr. Scarse shrugged his shoulders. "As if I cared," he said contemptuously. "My speeches in the House prove that I am sane enough. Well, Robert is my brother, and I was—I am—very fond of him. My sister Julia—Mrs. St. Leger, you know—never liked him, and when we cast him off she made up her mind to regard him as dead. She never even admits that she has a brother. I am her only relative—at least the only one she acknowledges."

"And why, pray, was Robert cast off thus, and by his affectionate twin?"

"Don't be sarcastic, Van Zwieten, it does not suit you," snapped Scarse. "My brother was a bad lot. At school and college he led the authorities a devil of a dance until he was expelled. When he came to London he took to gambling and drinking. I was never like that. My one desire was to get into Parlia-

ment, where my father had been before me, and serve my country. My sister married St. Leger—he was a subaltern then—and went out to India. My mother died, and there was no one to check Robert's pranks. My father paid his debts so often that we became quite impoverished. That is why I am so poor."

"Are you poor?" asked Van Zwieten, thinking regretfully that Brenda—sweet as she was—would have no dowry.

"As poor as a church mouse. I married a woman with six hundred a year, and out of that Brenda has two hundred a year. I can't touch it. What with the other four hundred and my own money I have but a thousand a year all told—little enough for a man of my position. Of course, when I die, my thousand a year will go to Brenda."

"Ah!" said Van Zwieten, with much satisfaction. He was sufficiently Dutch to be very fond of money.

"You needn't look so pleased, Van Zwieten. Even if you *do* marry Brenda—which I doubt since she hates you so—you won't get my money. I'll live a long time yet, and, in any case, I'll settle it on her so that her husband—whoever he may be—can't touch it."

"Quite right, Mr. Scarse. But about Robert? Please go on."

"Well, Robert crowned his pranks by committing forgery, and my father had to pay I don't know how many thousands to hush the matter up. You can make no use of this admission, Mr. van Zwieten, since the man whose name was forged died long ago and the papers are all destroyed. Robert went abroad after that, and my father cut him off with a shilling.

He forbade his name to be mentioned, and declared he was no son of his. Mrs. St. Leger acted in the same way, and I followed suit. I could do nothing else—if I had, my father would have disinherited me."

"Most affectionate twin!"

"Don't talk like that," cried Mr. Scarse, angrily. "Who are you to judge me? I still love my brother —after all, he is my own flesh and blood, and nearer and dearer to me than it is possible for you to imagine. But he is supposed to be dead these thirty and more years, and why should I bring him forth into the world only to be disgraced? I allow him a small income, and under another name he is as happy as ever he will be. By the way," he broke off suddenly, "how did you find out his real name?"

"Oh, I saw the resemblance and made use of my knowledge of his being in Chippingholt to force him into confessing the truth. I will tell you about that later on. Go on with your story, which is truly remarkable."

"Truly criminal, I think," Mr. Scarse said gloomily; "a nice family history for a sedate English gentleman to have. I wonder what my constituents would say if they heard it? Ah, there is a skeleton in every house. In a way it is a relief to me to talk of it even to you, Van Zwieten. Mrs. St. Leger will never mention or listen to the subject."

"Well, well, my friend,"—Van Zwieten was becoming impatient of this digression,—"what did your brother do when he was cut off from his family?"

"You'll never believe it when I tell you. Strange to say, he mended his ways. On the Continent—in

Switzerland, I fancy—he came into contact with some Socialists and inbibed their ideas. He put away all his fine clothes and extravagant tastes and became quite humble and simple."

"Because he had no money to do otherwise."

"There is something in that. Well, he lived among these Socialists for many a long year. He went to Russia and saw Tolstoi, knew Karl Marx, and threw himself headlong into schemes whereby the human race was to be saved by all manner of devices, having as their basis the equitable division of property. Then he married a young girl—a Swiss, the daughter of one of his socialistic friends—and returned to England. He was poor, so I helped him."

"Out of your poverty!—how noble!" sneered Van Zwieten, lighting a fresh cigar.

"Oh, I was richer then. I was married and my wife had money. Then she died a few years after Brenda was born, and I put the child to school as soon as she was of an age. She was brought up away from me," he went on sadly; "that is why I have such small influence over her."

"You will have influence enough to make her marry me, my friend."

"I doubt it—I doubt it. Well, my brother lived in a poor way, having but little money, besides which, his ideas were all against luxury. His wife was beautiful and frivolous and had no love for him. She coveted money and position, neither of which he could give her, and would not if he could. That was ten years ago."

"Ah! and what happened then?"

"My brother's wife met Malet. He was handsome, rich, and a scoundrel, and he ran away with her."

Van Zwieten appeared astonished. "He wasn't then married to Lady Jenny?"

"No, he married Lady Jenny later. But he ran off with my brother's wife to Italy. And the shock of his wife's treachery gave poor Robert brain fever."

"He loved her then?"

"He worshipped her. She was his life—he lived only to make her happy. Well, he had his recompense! She deceived him, deserted him. Without a word she eloped with that scoundrel. Robert lost his reason, and I had to put him in an asylum. There he was for two years. When he came out he went in search of his wife, for he still loved her. Malet by that time had come back alone, and shortly afterward he married Lady Jenny. The reptile! do you wonder that I hated him? For Robert's sake I saw him and forced him to tell the truth. I threatened to inform his wife of his past if he did not."

"But all that was before the marriage. No woman would care if ——"

"Lady Jenny would. She is half Italian and of an extremely jealous disposition. She loved Malet—God only knows why—and had she found out the truth then she would have left him. But Malet told me where to find my brother's wife, and I held my tongue."

"Did Lady Jenny ever learn this story?"

"You shall hear. Robert found his wife and took her back. She was a complete wreck and terribly unhappy. They lived at Poplar under another name on the small income I could allow them. For years I saw

very little of Robert. Then he took it into his head to pose as a prophet of evil, predicting woe to England. He assumed that snuff-colored coat and wore the crape scarf as a symbol of his mourning. He was frequently in trouble with the police, and several times I helped him out of his scrapes."

"Why don't you shut him up again?"

"Ah! my friend, how could I take the poor fellow from his dying wife? All those years she was bedridden and dying slowly. I could not part them. Latterly he used to come now and again to see me at Chippingholt, usually at night and in ordinary dress. On one occasion he arrived in the daytime and met Lady Jenny. He knew her by sight, and he told her the truth about his wife and her husband. That was a year ago. Lady Jenny was furious, and I believe she quarrelled with her husband. After that they were never the same to one another. She loved him once, but after that she must have hated him. Robert was foolish to have told her. It could do no good."

"Well—what then?"

"He went away, and for months I saw nothing of him. The next I heard was when Brenda told me Harold Burton had met a man like me with a crape scarf round his neck. From the description I recognized Robert, and knew that his mind must be more than ever unhinged for him to have come down in what he called his prophetic robes. I knew he would not come to see me till dusk, and I waited anxiously. But he did not appear, so I went out to look for him. It struck me that he might be lurking round the Manor gates to see Gilbert Malet, and perhaps to do

him an injury. I searched for a long time, and was caught in the storm. Then I found Robert in the orchards and led him home. He told me his news."

"What was his news?"

"His wife was dead, and he had come to tell Malet."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END OF THE STORY.

"His wife was dead," repeated Van Zwieten, without showing much sympathy, "and he came down to tell you!"

"No, he came to tell Malet."

"And kill him?"

Scarse shook his head. "I am telling you the truth," he said. "If Robert were guilty I should admit it. The poor fellow is crazy, as you know, and at the worst can only be put away in an asylum again. I am not afraid for him, but I fear a public scandal, which might shake my position and force me to resign my seat. No, Robert did not kill the man. But he met him and told him the truth."

"About what hour was that?"

"Shortly after nine o'clock. I met Robert wandering in the orchards at a quarter past, and I took him home with me. Malet, according to the doctor's evidence, was shot about half-past nine. At that time Robert was conversing with me in my study."

"But he met Malet," insisted Van Zwieten, rather disappointed at this statement, which he had every reason to believe was true.

"Yes, he met Malet, and told him that his victim was dead. Malet grossly insulted Robert, and there was a quarrel. Unable to restrain his anger, Robert

threw himself on Malet, but being an old man and feeble, he was easily overpowered and thrown to the ground. Robert told me this, and I believe it is the truth, because I found his crape scarf was torn—no doubt in the struggle. Malet left him lying on the wet grass and went off. He must have been shot almost immediately afterward."

"By whom?" asked Van Zwieten, keenly.

"Ah! that is the question. I have my suspicions, but I may be wrong. But when Brenda came home with the news of a murder I guessed that the victim was Malet. The servants came to my study door and found it locked. Robert was with me then, and I had locked the door because I did not want him to be seen. They thought it was you I was talking to, and I said it was you. When afterward you came in by the front door they knew, of course, that I had lied. Brenda asked me about that, and I still declared that you had been with me, but that you had gone out of the study window to the front door. I told her also that I was the man seen by Harold Burton."

"Why did you do that?"

"Can't you guess? To save Robert. He had a grievance against Malet, he had been struggling with him, and there was every chance that he might be accused of the murder. There was only my evidence to prove his *alibi*, and as I was his brother I dreaded lest my word should be insufficient. While the servants were with Brenda in the kitchen I went back to my study, put a coat of my own on Robert, and gave him a soft hat to pull down over his eyes. Then I gave him money, and told him to catch

the ten-thirty train from Chippingholt to Langton Junction."

"Which he did," said Van Zwieten. "I was watching all that business through your study window. I followed Robert, wondering who he was, and watched him go off by the train. Then I came home to the house and was admitted, as you know."

"Why did you not speak to me?"

"It was not the proper moment to speak. I did not know who Robert was, and until I entered the house I knew nothing about the murder. I also guessed the victim was Malet, and I thought you must have hired this man to kill him, and having finished with him, had got him safely out of the way."

"Ah! you were anxious to trap me!" cried Mr. Scarse, angrily. "Well, you know the truth now, and you can do nothing. I burned the crape scarf and I told Brenda I was the man Harold had seen. If you choose to make a scandal, I shall tell my story exactly as I have told it to you, and prove Robert's innocence. At the worst he can only be put under restraint again."

"I don't wish to make any scandal," said the Dutchman, mildly, "more especially seeing that your daughter is to be my wife. You can rely on my silence if only on that account. But I'm glad I have heard this story now. I want to know who killed Malet."

"That I can't say," said Mr. Scarse, gloomily. "But I suspect the wife!"

"Lady Jenny!—and why?"

"Robert had a note written to her saying his wife was dead—he brought it with him. He sent it up to her by a boy that same evening. Of course the boy thought that Robert was me."

"I see!" cried Van Zwieten, with a shout. "Robert wanted to stir up Lady Jenny into killing her husband. He is not so crazy, to my thinking. But I don't see how the intelligence of the wife's death would achieve it," he added, shaking his head gravely. "Lady Jenny knew all about the matter, and hadn't harmed her husband. There was no reason why she should do it on that particular night."

"That is what puzzles me," replied Mr. Scarse. "Lady Jenny was out on that night. She did not go to the Rectory to see Captain Burton as she had intended. For that she gave the very unsatisfactory reason that she was caught in the storm. Is it not probable that she met her husband and killed him?"

"No. She would not carry a revolver. If they had already met and quarrelled about this dead woman, then it is possible she might in her jealous rage have made an attack upon her husband with anything to her hand. But a revolver would argue deliberation, and there was nothing sufficiently strong in the note your brother had prepared for her to urge her to deliberate murder."

"Burton found a piece of crape in the dead man's hand," argued Scarse, "and Lady Jenny was wearing crape for her father. There might have been a struggle, and the piece might have come off in his hand."

"Nonsense, Scarse. Ladies don't do that sort of

thing. Besides, your brother wore crape too, and it is more likely that it was torn from his scarf. Malet might have kept it in his hand, without being conscious of it probably, when he went to his death."

"Then you think Lady Jenny is innocent?"

"It looks like it," Van Zwieten said with a queer smile; "but I'll let you know my opinion later on," and he rose to go.

"You will keep my secret," entreated Scarse, following his visitor to the door.

"Assuredly. I can make no use of it. I thought to find your brother guilty, but it seems he is not. The mystery deepens."

"But Lady Jenny?"

"True—Lady Jenny. Well, we shall see," and with this enigmatic speech the Dutchman withdrew. Mr. Scarse went back to his chair, and until midnight sat looking drearily into the fire. But he was sufficiently thoughtful to send a letter to Brenda telling her of his safety in spite of the Trafalgar Square mob.

For the next few days he went about like a man in a dream. Although he knew very well that Van Zwieten would hold his tongue—for he had nothing to gain by wagging it—he blamed himself for having been coerced into a confession. To him the Dutchman was almost a stranger. He had been drawn to the man because he was going out to the Transvaal as an official, and Mr. Scarse had always sympathized with the little state in its struggle for independence. The Dutchman had drawn so pathetic a picture of that struggle, had spoken so feelingly of the Boers as

a patriarchal people who desired only to be left tending their flocks and herds, that the English politician was touched. He had sworn to do all in his power to defend this simple people, had become extremely friendly with Van Zwieten, and in proof of that friendship had asked him down to Chippingholt. There the Dutchman, by spying and questioning, had learned so much of his family secrets as to have become his master. As such he had forced him into a confession, and Mr. Scarse felt—if a scandal was to be avoided—that he was at the man's mercy.

Of course Brenda would be the price of his silence. Formerly Scarse had been willing enough that his daughter should marry Van Zwieten. It would be a noble work for her to aid him to build up a new state in South Africa. But now he saw that the Dutchman was by no means the unselfish philanthropist he had supposed him to be. He was tricky and shifty. His was the iron hand in the velvet glove, and if he became Brenda's husband it was by no means improbable that he would ill-treat her. It did not seem right to force her into this marriage when she loved another man. After all, she was his daughter—his only daughter; and Scarse's paternal instinct awoke even thus late in the day to prompt him to protect and cherish her. If he felt for poor Robert and his woes, surely he could feel for the troubles of Brenda.

Musing thus, it occurred to him that he might frustrate any probable schemes of Van Zwieten by telling the whole truth to Brenda. Then let her marry Harold and defy the man. At all events he determined that Brenda should be introduced to the family skele-

ton, and accordingly one afternoon he drove to Kensington. Mrs. St. Leger was out, so was the colonel, and he found his daughter alone.

When he entered—for all the world like an old grey wolf—for his troubles had aged him—Brenda came forward with a look of astonishment in her eyes. Usually her father was not so attentive as to pay her a visit; and she could not conjecture the meaning of the tender expression on his face. As a matter of fact Mr. Scarse was realizing for the first time that this tall, beautiful girl was his daughter. But she could not divine this, and her welcome to him was, as usual, quite cold.

"How are you, father?" she said, kissing him in a conventional way. "I am glad to see you, but I expected Harold, and was quite astonished when you came in."

"And disappointed too, I suppose," said Scarse, in a low voice.

Something in his tone struck her sensitive ear as unusual. "No, I am glad to see you," she repeated, "but—but—but, you know, father, there was never much love lost between us."

"Ah, Brenda, I fear that too much love has been lost. I wish to speak openly and seriously to you, Brenda"—he looked at her piteously—"but I don't know how to begin."

"Are you not well, father?"

"Yes, yes, I am quite well," he replied, leaning on her shoulder as she led him to the sofa. "But I'm worried, dear, worried. Sit down here."

"Worried—what about?" She sat down, but

could not as yet grasp the situation. It was so novel, so unexpected.

"About you—about myself. My dear, I have not been a good father to you."

Brenda stared. Were the heavens going to fall? So astonished was she by this wholly unexpected show of tenderness that she could make no answer. He looked at her anxiously and continued, "I fear I have been so engrossed by my duty to my country that I have forgotten my duty to you, my child. I should not have left you so long at school away from me. No wonder you have so little affection for me. I am not much more than a name to you. But I see now how wrong I have been, Brenda dear, and I want to do my best to make amends to you. You will let me?"

"Father!" she cried, all her warm and generous heart going out to him in his penitence. She threw her arms round his neck. "Don't say any more, dear. I have to ask your forgiveness too, for I have not been all a daughter should be to you."

"Ah, Brenda, it is my fault. I kept you from me. But that shall not be now, dear. I have found my daughter and I will keep her. Kiss me, Brenda."

She kissed him, and her eyes filled with tears. In that moment of joy in finding her father she forgot even Harold. These words of tenderness were balm to her aching heart, and, too deeply moved to speak, she wept on his shoulder. Henceforth she would be different—everything would be different. And the man himself was scarcely less moved.

"How foolish I have been, Brenda. I have lost the substance for the shadow."

"No, no, father. I love you. I have always loved you. But I thought you did not care for me."

"I care for you now, Brenda. Hush, hush, do not cry, child."

"You won't ask me to marry Mr. van Zwieten now, father?"

"No," replied he, vigorously. "I intend to have nothing further to do with that man."

"Ah!" she exclaimed, raising her head. "At last you have found him out!"

"No, dear, I have not exactly found him out, but I have come to the conclusion that he is double-dealing and dangerous. You shall not marry him, Brenda. You love Harold, and Harold shall be your husband. But I must not lose my daughter," he added tenderly.

"You shall not, father. You shall gain a son. Oh, how happy I am!" and laying her head upon his shoulder she wept tears of pure joy.

For some moments he did not speak, but held her to him closely. He, too, was happy—had not felt so happy for years. How he regretted now having kept this warm, pure affection at arm's length for so long. But time was passing, and Mrs. St. Leger and the colonel might be back at any moment, and he had much to tell her.

"Listen to me, Brenda dear," he said, raising her head gently. "Do you remember the man so like me whom Harold saw?"

"The man with the crape scarf? Of course I remember him, father." She looked steadfastly at him, expecting a revelation since he had so unexpectedly

introduced the subject. "I saw him in Trafalgar Square on the day of the meeting."

"And you knew that it was not me?"

"Yes; but he was so like you, that had he not been on the platform I might easily have mistaken him for you, like Harold did."

"Had you spoken to him you would have found out your mistake," sighed Scarse.

"I wanted to, but Mr. van Zwieten took him away."

"I know—I know. Brenda, I deceived you about that man for your own sake and for mine. I took his sins on my shoulders that he might not get into trouble."

"What?" Brenda's voice rose almost to a shriek. "Did he kill Mr. Malet?"

"No, no," replied her father, eagerly. "I can prove to you that he did not. But, Brenda, do you not wonder why he is so like me, and why I take so deep an interest in him?"

"I do wonder. I thought he might be a relative. But you denied it, and Aunt Julia said she had no relative but you."

Mr. Scarse drooped his head. "Julia? Ah, she is still bitter against poor Robert!"

"Robert?—who is he?"

"My twin brother, Brenda—your uncle!"

"Oh!" Brenda threw up her hands in surprise. "And I never knew."

"No one knows but your aunt and myself, and she denies him—and Van Zwieten knows."

"Oh, father! How can he know?"

"I told him," replied Mr. Scarse, quietly. "I was

forced to tell him, lest he should imagine the truth to be worse than it is. And he might have got me into trouble—and not only me, but poor, mad Robert."

"Mad! Is my uncle mad?"

"Yes, poor soul. Now I will tell you what made him mad—the same story that I was forced to tell Van Zwieten."

Brenda looked anxiously at her father and placed her hand in his. Grasping it hard, he related the sad family history he had told the Dutchman, suppressing nothing, extenuating nothing. Brenda listened in profound silence. At times her eyes flashed, at times she wept, but never a word did she say. When her father had finished her sorrow burst forth.

"My dear father, how good you are! To think I have been such a bad daughter, and you with all this worry on you! Oh, forgive me, forgive me!" and she threw herself sobbing into his arms.

"My dear, there is nothing to forgive. I have told you why I bore this trouble in silence—why I told Van Zwieten."

"Thank God you don't want me to marry him," sobbed Brenda. "Harold and I are going to be married quietly at Brighton."

"Better wait a while yet," said Scarse, nervously; "it will drive Van Zwieten into a corner if you marry now, and you don't know what he may do then."

"He can't do anything, father. If he does attempt it I have only to tell Lady Jenny; she can manage him. Harold has gone to see her about it."

Somewhat astonished at this, Scarse was about to

ask what way Lady Jenny could control Van Zwieten when the door opened and Captain Burton walked in, looking considerably more cheerful than when Brenda had seen him last. He pulled up short at the amazing sight of the girl in her father's arms.

"Harold!" she exclaimed. "Oh, how glad I am you have come! I have so much to tell you; and father—father——"

"Father has just discovered that he has a dear daughter," said Scarse, holding out his hand to the astounded young man. "Yes, Harold, and I consent to your marriage gladly."

"But what about Van Zwieten?" gasped Captain Burton, utterly at a loss to understand this sudden change of front.

"He shall never marry Brenda. I'll tell you all about it."

"Wait one minute, father," cried the girl. "Harold, did you see Lady Jenny?"

"Yes, Brenda, I have seen her. It is all right; she can manage Van Zwieten. No, I won't tell you now. She particularly wishes to do that herself."

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT VAN ZWIETEN KNEW.

THE clever criminal who wishes to escape the law does not seek provincial neighborhoods or foreign climes. He remains in London; for him no place is so safe. There a man can disappear from one district and reappear in another without danger of recognition by unwelcome friends. Of course the pertinacity of the police may do much to complicate matters, but the history of crime goes to show very clearly that they are by no means infallible. But about them Van Zwieten troubled himself very little. Certainly he changed his name to Jones, for his own, in those anti-Dutch times, smacked overmuch of Holland. But for the rest his disguise was slight. From St. James's he changed his address to a part of Westminster where none of his West End friends were likely to come across him; and as Mr. Jones he carried on his plotting against the Empire with every sense of security. And in such security he saw only a strong proof of John Bull's stupidity. An Englishman would have seen in it a glorious example of freedom.

In a side street Van Zwieten, *alias* Mr. Jones, dwelt on the first floor of a quiet house let out in lodgings by the quietest of widows. And Mrs. Hicks had a good opinion of her lodger. It is true he was somewhat erratic in his movements. For days he would go

away—into the country, he said—and even when in town would be absent for many hours at a stretch. But he paid well and regularly, was not exacting about either his food or attendance, and behaved altogether in the most becoming manner. He certainly saw a great number of people, and they called on him principally at night, but Mr. Jones had kindly informed her how he was writing a great book on London, and how these people were gathering materials for him. Had Mrs. Hicks known the kind of materials they were collecting, she might or might not have been astonished. Certainly she would have been but little the wiser.

A decent, if narrow-minded little person, Mrs. Hicks knew little of politics and still less of spies. These latter—on those few occasions when they had presented themselves to her mind—she pictured as foreign persons given to meeting by candlelight with mask and cloaks and daggers. That the kind gentleman who was so polite to her and so kind to her fatherless children should be a spy assuredly never entered Mrs. Hick's head.

Van Zwieten—it is more convenient to call him so—sat in his rooms one night in the second week in October. His face wore a satisfied smile, for a great event had taken place. Free State and Transvaal, under the sapient guidance of their Presidents, had thrown down the gage of defiance to England, and the Federal armies were overrunning Natal. Scarse and his following were dreadfully shocked at this sample of simplicity on the part of their "innocent lamb." It was all out of keeping with Mr. Kruger's pacific intentions as extolled by them. Indeed, they

found it necessitated a change of tactics on their part, so they right-about faced and deplored that war should thus have been forced on an honest, God-fearing man. In all sincerity they tried to divide the country on the question of the war; and in Brussels Leyds was doing his best to hound on the Continental Powers to attacking England. Altogether Van Zwieten was very well satisfied with the outlook. What with the unprepared state of the British in Natal, Leyds on the Continent, Scarse and his friends in London, it seemed as though the Boers, by treachery and cunning and the due display of armament—as formidable as it was wholly unlooked for—would come safely out of the desperate adventure to which they had committed themselves. Van Zwieten's part was to send off certain final information to Leyds for transmission to Pretoria, and then to leave England.

But Van Zwieten was not going out to fight for his adopted country. Oh, dear, no! He had ostensibly thrown up his appointment in the Transvaal—which in truth he had never held—in great indignation before the war began. Proclaiming himself as a neutral person anxious to reconcile the English and the Boers, he had solicited and obtained the post of war correspondent on a Little England newspaper called *The Morning Planet.* This paper, whose columns were filled with the hysterical hooting of Scarse and his friends, was only too glad to employ a foreigner instead of an Englishman, and Van Zwieten received good pay, and an order to go to the front at once.

Now he was occupied in burning a mass of papers, gathering up the loose ends of his innumerable con-

spiracies, and looking forward to a speedy departure. All his spies had been paid and dismissed. He had one more letter to despatch to the patriotic Leyds, and then he was free to turn his attention to his private affairs.

These were concerned chiefly with an attempt to force Brenda into giving up Burton and accepting his hand, by threatening to denounce her father and his brother. He had never for a moment intended to keep the promise he had made to Scarse. He was too "slim" for that. He possessed knowledge which would serve him to his own ends, and he intended to use it for that purpose. Burton, too, was to leave with his regiment next day, and was already at Southampton. And once he was parted from Brenda there would be a better chance of bringing her to see reason. Van Zwieten smiled sweetly as he thought on these things, and gave himself up to the contemplation of that rosy future when the Republics conquered England, as they assuredly would. He forgot that very significant saying that man proposes and God disposes. But Van Zwieten was a heathen, and had very little belief in an overruling Providence.

He knew how to make himself snug did this Dutchman. His room was large, and comfortably if not luxuriously furnished. Wall paper, carpet and curtains were all of a dark green tone. Two windows led on to a light iron balcony, but at present these were closed and the curtains were drawn. The firelight—he had lighted a fire because the evening was chilly—shed its comfortable glow on the two easy-chairs wherewith he had supplemented the furniture of

Mrs. Hicks. To him belonged also a tall press with pigeon-holes filled with papers, and a knee-hole desk with many drawers and brass knobs. On this latter the lamp was placed, and its crimson shade shut off the light beyond the immediate circle cast on the desk. On the mantel glittered a gimcrack French clock, and three extraordinary ornaments with brass pendants. But altogether the room was decidedly comfortable, and as Mr. van Zwieten did not pay for it out of his own pocket, maybe he enjoyed it all the more on that account.

At the present moment he was shifting papers from the pigeon-holes into an iron box, destroying some, and burning others, and executing the business with ease and despatch.

While he was thus employed a timid knock came at the door. He knew the knock well, and he knew that behind it was Mrs. Hicks. He did not desist from his occupation because he held her of but small account. It would have been otherwise had the knock been sharp and peremptory.

"Well, Mrs. Hicks," he said graciously as the pale widow glided in, "what is it?"

"If you please, Mr. Jones, there is a man waiting to see you."

"A man—a gentleman?"

"A common person, sir, in a rough coat, and a cap and big boots. I don't think he's a gentleman, as he speaks rough like, and his black hair and beard look very untidy, Mr. Jones. I was once a lady's maid, sir, so I ought to know a gentleman when I see him."

"Show him up," said Van Zwieten, curtly; then, as she left the room, he made certain preparations. He closed the press doors and the lid of his iron box, seated himself at his desk, and glanced into a drawer to be sure that his revolver was handy. In Van Zwieten's walk of life it was necessary to be forearmed as well as forewarned.

The man who shortly afterward came tramping into the room fully bore out Mrs. Hicks's description. He was of medium height and rather stout, and was roughly dressed in coarse blue serge, and had a tangle of black curls and a heavy black beard. He was not a prepossessing object. In response to Van Zwieten's invitation he shuffled into an armchair by the desk, and pushed it well back into the shadow. The act, though skillfully done, roused the Dutchman's suspicions. But he was accustomed in his delicate profession to deal with curious customers, and he showed no surprise. He did not even shift the shade of the lamp. But very much on the alert, he waited for the stranger to state his business.

"Is your name Jones?" asked the man, in a gruff, surly voice.

"Yes, that is my name. And yours?"

"Dobbs—Augustus Dobbs. I should have brought a letter to you, but I didn't. It's better to do my own business off my own hook, I reckon."

"Are you a Yankee?" asked Van Zwieten, noting the expression and a slight twang.

"I guess so. I come from N'York City, I do; and I fancy a run out to the Transvaal to have a slap at the Britishers."

"Indeed!" said the Dutchman, staring blankly at his visitor, "and what have I to do with your ambitions in that direction?"

The man drew the back of his hand across his mouth, and Van Zwieten noted that the hand was white and well cared for. This, in contrast to the rough dress and harsh voice, made him more circumspect than ever. He began to suspect a trap, and wondered which of his enemies—for he had many—could have set it.

"Do you know a man named Mazaroff?" asked Mr. Dobbs, after a pause.

"No," replied Van Zwieten, lying cheerfully; "never heard of him."

"He's a Russian."

"The name sounds like it."

Dobbs looked disappointed and turned sullen. "He knows you, Mr. Jones!"

"Indeed, that is not improbable. Did he send you to me?"

"Yes, he did." Dobbs had dropped his American accent by this time, and only used it again when he recollected himself. "Mazaroff said you paid well for certain information."

"What kind of information?"

"About the war." He leaned forward and spoke in a gruff whisper. "What would you say to a plan of the whole campaign against the Boers?"

Van Zwieten smiled blandly. "Of what possible interest can that be to me?"

"Mazaroff said you would be prepared to pay well for such information."

"He knows me then better than I do myself," replied Van Zwieten. "Better than I know him, for indeed I have no knowledge of your Russian friend. But this plan of campaign, Mr. Dobbs, how did it come into your possession?"

Dobbs looked round mysteriously, and rising in his chair, leaned toward Van Zwieten. "I stole it," he said softly, "and I am willing to sell it—at a price. Think of it, Mr. Jones, a plan of campaign! Symons's plans! The Boers would be able to frustrate it easily."

Van Zwieten looked his man up and down with a smile. His gaze alighted on those well-kept hands, which his visitor had placed on the desk to steady himself as he leaned forward. On the third finger of the left hand was a ring, and Van Zwieten recognized it. It was a gold signet ring with a crest.

The moment he set eyes on it, the spy jumped to a conclusion, which happened to be the right one. He knew now who his visitor was, and he played him as a skillful angler plays a trout. Not a muscle of his face moved, not a flush or a look betrayed his newly-gained knowledge. But he smiled behind his golden beard to think that he was master of the situation.

"So Mr. Mazaroff told you that I bought such things?" he said negligently.

"Yes, and that you paid a large price for them."

"Ah! and what would you call a fair price for these papers?"

"Say a thousand pounds."

"That is a very large price indeed. Too large, I

fear, for me," said Van Zwieten, most amiably. "Perhaps you can see your way to make it lower?"

The visitor could not refrain from a movement of satisfaction, which was duly noted by the astute Dutchman.

"Well," he said, "I will do what I can to meet you." Van Zwieten smiled. He saw that the man was growing excited, and that in his excitement he would probably betray himself.

"That is accommodating of you, Mr. Dobbs. But how can I be certain this plan is genuine?"

"You can be perfectly certain, for I stole it from the War Office!"

"Indeed. That is certainly first hand. But how did you, an American, get into the War Office?"

"I have been a porter there for some time," said Dobbs, glibly. "I am allowed access to all the rooms. I saw those papers on a desk, and I took them. Mazaroff told me you paid well, so—well, I came to you. Come, now, you shall have them for five hundred pounds."

"Too much, Mr. Dobbs."

"Three hundred," said the man, trembling with eagerness.

"Ah, that's more reasonable. Have you the papers with you?"

"No, but if you will come to my lodgings I will give them to you. But I must have the money first."

"Certainly. Will a check do?"

"Oh, yes, a check will do right enough."

Van Zwieten produced a check-book and bent over it to hide a smile. He drew the check, but before

signing it looked up. "Of course this rather inculpates you," he said. "I suppose you know what it means if you were caught at this game?"

"I'm willing to take the risk," said Dobbs, nervously.

"Quite so. Just see if I've got your name correctly. Burton, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Wilfred Burton."

"I—I—don't understand ——"

Van Zwieten deftly twitched the beard off the face of his visitor and snatched the shade off the lamp. "Do you understand now?" he said, laughing. "Look in the glass, sir, and see if Augustus Dobbs is not Wilfred Burton?"

Wilfred was ghastly pale, but more with rage at the failure of his scheme than with fear. With a cry of anger he sprang up and whipped a revolver out of his pocket. But Van Zwieten, on the alert for some such contingency, was quite as quick. He also snatched a revolver from the drawer, and with levelled weapons the two men faced one another. Van Zwieten was as calm as the other was excited.

"You are very clever, Mr. Burton," he said mockingly; "but when you are in disguise you should not wear a signet ring. I observed your crest on the letters written to Miss Scarse by your brother. Come! how long are we to stand like this? Is it a duel? If so, I am ready."

Wilfred uttered an oath and slipped his weapon into his pocket. With a laugh Van Zwieten tossed his into the drawer again, and sat down quite unruffled.

"I think we understand one another now," he said genially. "What induced you to play this trick on me?"

"Because you are a spy," replied Wilfred, fiercely; "and if I had my way I would put a bullet through you."

"Well, and why don't you?" mocked Van Zwieten. "Do you see that iron box?—it is full of papers which might be of the greatest interest to you. Shoot me and take possession of it. Your Government would reward you—or hang you!"

"They'll hang *you* if they learn the truth. We are at war with the Boers, and you are a Boer spy. A word from me and you would be arrested."

"I dare say. There are enough documents in that box to hang me. I dare say you bribed Mazaroff and learned my business, also my address here as Mr. Jones. But I am not afraid—not that!" Van Zwieten snapped his fingers "You can walk out and call up the police if you like."

"And what is to prevent my doing so?"

"Two things. One is that I leave immediately for the Transvaal. Oh, yes, my work here is done, and well done. I have found out how unprepared you English are for this war. You talk big, but there is nothing at the back of it."

"Confound you!" cried Wilfred, his white face flushing, "you'll find out what is at the back of it when we hoist the British flag at Pretoria. What is the second thing?"

"Your brother. You love your brother, no doubt, Mr. Burton. He sails to-morrow with his regiment

from Southampton. Quite so. Well, Mr. Burton, it is a good thing he is going. It is better he should be shot than hanged."

"Hanged!" Wilfred sprang from his seat with a bound.

"The morning after the murder," continued Van Zwieten, without taking any notice, "I examined the place where Malet was shot. Ah! you blind English, who see nothing even when it lies under your nose. I am Dutch. I am sharp. I looked—and looked—and I found this!" He slipped his hand into the open drawer of the desk and produced a heavy revolver of the army pattern. "This, Mr. Burton—with which your brother shot Mr. Malet."

"You—you can't prove it is Harold's," said he, white but calm.

"Easily. Here is a silver plate on the butt with his name. Now, what do you say?"

"That my brother is innocent. The revolver is his, but some one else fired the shot."

Van Zwieten shrugged his shoulders. "I am afraid you will find it difficult to get a jury to take that view, Mr. Burton. Your brother quarrelled with Malet—he was overheard to threaten him—he was out in the storm and could not account for his time—and here is his revolver. With all that evidence I could hang him. But you know—well, I'll be generous. Hold your tongue and I'll hold mine. What do you say?"

Wilfred looked piercingly at Van Zwieten, who had dropped his bantering tone and was in earnest. "Harold is innocent," said he, "but—I'll hold my tongue."

CHAPTER XV.

THE GIRL HE LEFT BEHIND HIM.

When Wilfred had taken his departure, Van Zwieten drew a breath of relief. He had only escaped a great danger by virture of his ready resource and the excitability and hot-headed impulsiveness of his adversary.

Without doubt Wilfred's plan—and a harum-scarum plan it was—had been to decoy him into an ambush of police, on the pretence of selling him the so-called State papers, and when he had irretrievably betrayed himself, to have had him arrested as a spy. Thanks only to his skill in penetrating the disguise of his visitor, Van Zwieten had evaded this peril; but he had been in greater danger than even Wilfred knew.

The papers in the iron box were sufficient to prove him a spy ten times over. Had Wilfred only been astute enough to have procured a search warrant on the evidence of Mazaroff, and with the assistance of the police to have raided the premises of the so-called Mr. Jones, these papers would have been discovered, and Mr. van Zwieten's little games put an end to for the time being.

But Wilfred had let the golden moment go by, and the Dutchman was safe from his worst enemy—that is from the one who wished him most harm, and who knew most to his disadvantage.

There was no doubt that Wilfred was now powerless to move against him. By skillfully suggesting that Harold had committed the murder,—which was untrue—and producing the revolver inscribed with Harold's name, which had been found near the scene of the murder,—which was true—Van Zwieten had effectually stopped the mouth of Mr. Wilfred Burton. If that young man now denounced him to the authorities he would do so at the risk of having his brother arrested. And in the face of such evidence it might be that Harold would be found guilty. In any case he would be prevented from sailing for South Africa. But Van Zwieten, while looking after himself, had no wish that things should go thus far. He was most anxious that Captain Burton should go to the front, for if chance did not aid him, he had quite determined to have him specially shot in action.

At present things were going as he wished. Wilfred was coerced into silence, he himself was safe, and Harold was about to go to his death in Natal. There remained only Brenda to deal with, and with her Mr. van Zwieten hoped to come to an understanding very shortly now.

The rest of the night he spent in burning such papers as he did not require and in packing the remainder in the iron box. It was of no great size this box, and one man could carry it away with ease. Van Zwieten locked it, and then stowed it away on the top of the tall press, in a hollow formed by the ornamentation of the crest. Into this the precious box just fitted; and thus carelessly deposited, he took it to be far safer than any more elaborate attempt at

concealment could make it. A thief would assuredly make for the safe first and foremost, so would the police, while neither would think of looking on the top of the press. Not that Van Zwieten expected either thieves or police, for that matter; but it was his habit to place the box there, and what had happened in no way caused him to depart from his usual custom.

Having thus finished his work, he went to bed and slept for a few hours. And as he closed his eyes his thoughts were altogether pleasant.

"I shall go down to Southampton to-morrow," they ran, "and see Burton off for the front. I sha'n't exactly relish being witness of his very tender leave-taking with Brenda; but it will be some satisfaction to know it's for the last time. She won't see him again. We'll be married at once and I'll follow close on his heels. If he only knew! If *she* only knew! But that is what shall be. I, Van Zwieten, have spoken. Then, once in the British camp, I can both serve these brave little Republics and make sure that Captain Harold Burton is made short work of. That will be very easily done. And then when all is over, and these British hogs are driven into the sea, I'll come and fetch my little wife, and there, amid the glorious expanse of the veldt, we shall live together happily ever after." A beautiful little castle of cards truly, but one which, had he only known, was destined to be very much knocked about by Fate, over which not even he, Van Zwieten, had control.

Next morning he was up betimes, and handing the key of his rooms to Mrs. Hicks with strict injunctions

to admit no one, he set off for Waterloo Station. He knew that he could trust his little landlady, and he judged it wiser to do so than to lock up and take the key in his pocket, for of that even she might have been suspicious.

On his way to the terminus he again relapsed into a gentle and wholly self-congratulatory reverie; and with a religious zeal worthy of a follower of Oom Paul he fished from the deep recesses of his memory a text bearing on the destruction of the unrighteous—to wit, in this instance, Messieurs Wilfred and Harold Burton.

The ancient town of Southampton was gay with flags, crowded with people, and bubbling over with excitement and bustle. Through the streets marched the troops in khaki, with resolute faces and swinging tread, while those whose rights they were going to defend cheered them, poured blessings on them, and sought to enliven them with frequent snatches of patriotic song. Not since the days of the Crimea—a dim memory even to the older generation—had there been such excitement. And the great transport lay there—a floating barracks—ready and impatient to carry these brave fellows overseas to vindicate the name of Britain as a civilizing and protective power. Oom Paul had been given rope enough; now he was going to hang himself, or be hanged, as he assuredly deserved to be.

Maybe Van Zwieten thought otherwise. He surveyed the excited throng with his usual bland smile, and pushed his way through their midst down to the quay. Knowing, as no one else did, the true power of the Republics, he smiled grimly as he thought how

soon all this joy would be turned into mourning. But what Mr. van Zwieten did not know—what he could not realize—was that the more terrible the danger threatening a Britisher the more does he set his back to the wall, and set his teeth to meet it and to conquer.

In the bright sunlight the troops embarked, speeches were made, healths were drunk, and many a hand gripped hand. On board the transport the officers were busy looking after their men and superintending the horses being taken on board. Brenda, quietly dressed, and doing her best to keep up her spirits, was leaning on the arm of her father, and longing for a few last words with Harold. But Captain Burton—a fine, soldierly figure in his khaki uniform—was on duty, and could not be spared for the moment.

Much as Mr. Scarse disliked the war and reprobated the causes which had led to it, he had come down with Brenda to see the last of Harold; but in the face of all this he could not but lament inwardly that the good offices of the peace party had not prevailed. This stir and military activity was surely out of all proportion to the business in hand—the subjugation of a mere handful of farmers! But Mr. Scarse forgot that wasps are not so easily crushed—that the larger the fist that tries to crush them the greater the chance of its being stung. While thus meditating on the iniquity of his country, he felt his daughter start, and when he looked at her he saw that she was white and trembling.

"What is it, Brenda?" he asked nervously, for he had not been the same man since his interview with the Dutchman.

"I have seen Mr. van Zwieten," she replied faintly.

"He is yonder in the crowd. He smiled in that horrible way of his when he caught my eye."

"Never mind, Brenda. Van Zwieten can do no harm now; and shortly we shall be rid of him altogether. He is going out to the Cape."

"To Pretoria, you mean."

"No, I mean to the Cape," returned her father. "Rather to my surprise, I hear he has given up his appointment in the Transvaal, and has thrown in his lot with this misguided country. He goes with Lord Methuen as the correspondent of *The Morning Planet*—to report the massacre of his unfortunate countrymen, I suppose."

"I don't believe he is on our side," Brenda said vehemently. "At heart he is a traitor, and has been living in London spying for the benefit of the Boers—so, at least, Wilfred tells me."

"Wilfred is an excitable boy. Can he prove this wild charge?"

"Not now; but he intends to do so later."

"He never will. Believe me, I don't like Van Zwieten, and I regret very much that I ever made a friend of him, but I don't think he is a spy."

"I'm sure he is!"

"How *can* you be sure?"

"Because I hate him," replied Brenda, with true feminine logic. "And if he is going to the front, I'll tell Harold to keep a sharp eye on him."

"It might be quite as well, dear," replied her father, "forewarned is forearmed; and when he learns the truth about you, it is quite possible he might attempt some plot against Harold."

"I'm not afraid. Harold can protect himself even against such a scoundrel as Van Zwieten. Here is Harold, father. How splendid he looks!"

Brenda might well be excused for her enthusiasm. Captain Harold Burton did make a most striking and soldierly figure in his close-fitting khaki uniform. He was trim and natty in his dress, bright and ardent, and full of enthusiasm for the work before him. Brenda would have had him a trifle more subdued since he was about to leave her; but she had no cause to complain when he said good-bye. He felt their parting as much as she did, even though as a man and a soldier he was more able to conceal his emotions.

"Come down to my cabin, Brenda," he said, taking her arm, "I have got ten minutes to spare. We start in half an hour."

"I won't come," Mr. Scarse said, waving his hand. "Take her down, Harold, and get it over."

The two went below amongst the busy throng of stewards who were darting about getting the cabins in order. Into one on the starboard side Captain Burton led his wife. He shared it with a brother officer, who was at that moment on duty. Harold closed the door. The girl was crying bitterly now. He took her in his arms.

"Don't cry, dear little wife," he said tenderly. "Please God, I'll come back to you safe and sound."

"Oh, Harold, you will, I know you will!" she said earnestly. "Nothing will happen to you. I dreamed it did, Harold, and dreams always go by contraries, you know. Dearest, if only I were coming with you, I wouldn't mind."

"Dear Brenda, it is better as it is; besides, I should have had to leave you at Cape Town. You could not have come to the front. No, dear, you stay with your father, and pray for a speedy end to the war. Remember you are my wife now, Brenda, so I have no fear of any harm coming to you through that scoundrel Van Zwieten."

"He is here, Harold. I saw him among the crowd. I have no fear for you, dear, there at the front; but—well, I am afraid of Van Zwieten's treachery."

"But he is in England, dearest; he can't hurt me out there."

"He is leaving for the Cape almost immediately. Father told me so."

"Well, then," laughed Harold to comfort her, "if I see him in the ranks of the enemy I'll shoot him before he can take sight at me. Will that do?"

"Harold, he won't be in the ranks of the enemy."

"Why not? The fellow is a Boer—or to all intents and purposes will be when he takes up his Transvaal appointment."

"That's just it. He has given up the appointment and is going out as correspondent to *The Morning Planet.*"

Captain Burton wrinkled his forehead. "I don't like this sudden conversion," he said decisively. "Wilfred believes the fellow is a spy."

"And so do I, dearest—from the bottom of my heart."

"Well, if he's going to hang about our camps for the spy business I'll make short work of him."

"Be careful, Harold—oh, be careful. He is a dangerous man."

"I shall know how to manage him out there. Wilfred is coming out, you know, in a week or so, and I'll get him to tell me all he knows about Van Zwieten. If he is a spy, we'll watch him and have him slung up. I'll keep my eyes open, Brenda. And if he tries on any games before he leaves England, just you see Lady Jenny."

"What can she do?"

"A great deal. She wouldn't tell me how she meant to manage him, but she told me she would bring him to his knees. That was why I determined to marry you before I left. Now that you are my wife, Lady Jenny will look after you. You must promise me, dear, that you'll go at once to her if he should cause you the least uneasiness."

"I promise, dearest, for your sake. Oh, Harold, how I wish I was going!"

"Yes, dear, I know you do. But you are a soldier's wife now, and they do their work at home. I have made my will leaving all I have to you, Brenda; and if I don't come back"—his strong voice trembled—"you will have enough to live on. At all events, your father has the will."

"Harold! Harold!" she cried, weeping on his breast, for this parting was very bitter to her, "how can I bear it, darling? Dearest, be careful of your dear life for my sake—for me, your wife."

"Hush, dear, hush, I am in the hands of God." He pressed her closely to him and kissed her in silence. Then he looked upward and said a silent fervent prayer. They clung to each other with aching hearts, too deeply moved, too sorrowful for words. Then

the tramping of feet overhead, the sound of cheers, the shrill voice of the bo'sun's whistle, made them start up.

"Brenda," whispered Harold, pressing her again to his heart, "good-bye, my own dearest."

"Oh, Harold! Harold! Good-bye, darling! God bless you and bring you back to me."

On deck he led her to her father who was standing by the gangway, and placed her in his arms. "Take care of her, sir," he said in a low voice, then hurried away at the call of duty.

Father and daughter descended the gangway to the wharf. She stood as in a dream, with streaming eyes, among other women, and looked at the great ship. The shouts of the crowd, the glitter of the sunshine, the many-colored bunting, seemed like a cruel mockery to her aching heart. Her Harold was gone from her—and God knew when he would return. And everywhere the women wept and strained and ached at parting with their dear ones.

The transport was like a hive at swarming-time. The soldiers were hanging over the bulwarks and clinging to the rigging. Hats and handkerchiefs waved, women wept and men cheered. Then amidst all the noise and movement the blades of the screw began slowly to churn the water. As the seething white foam swirled astern, the band struck up "Auld Lang Syne," and the great ship swung majestically into mid-stream, her engines throbbing, and black smoke pouring through her funnels from the newly stoked furnaces below. Brenda, for weeping, could hardly see the grey monster gliding over the glittering waters; nor, strain as she would, could she make

out her Harold's dear face amongst those hundreds of faces turned shoreward. The band changed the tune:

"I'm leaving thee in sorrow, Annie,
I'm leaving thee in tears."

"My God!" exclaimed Brenda, almost hysterical now as she clutched her father's arm.

"Miss Scarse," said a voice at her elbow.

Brenda looked up with a tear-stained face, and a look of horror came into her eyes as she saw Van Zwieten's hateful, calm face. "You! you! Ah, Harold!"

"Go away, sir, go away," said Mr. Scarse, curtly. Then he began to push through the crowd with Brenda clinging to his arm.

"I must speak to Miss Scarse," insisted the Dutchman, following.

The old man turned on him like a wolf. "There is no Miss Scarse," he said firmly. "My daughter is now Mrs. Harold Burton."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS.

As the full meaning of those words came upon him, Van Zwieten paled. His wicked eyes flashed fire, and he uttered an oath which, being in Dutch, was happily unintelligible to those around him. For the moment he could neither move nor speak; and seeing his momentary helplessness, Mr. Scarse, with Brenda on his arm, hurried on through the crowd.

Before the Dutchman could recover his presence of mind, there were already two or three lines of people between him and those whom he had fondly thought his victims. They had tricked him in spite of all his caution; even Scarse, whom he had been so sure of, had turned against him. But he would be revenged, and that speedily. Conjecturing that they would probably go to the railway station, Van Zwieten hurried thither. If he did not find them in the London train, then he would wait till he did. In any case he swore to get at the truth about this marriage. Their punishment should follow.

On his part, Mr. Scarse, seeing the devil which looked out of the Dutchman's eyes, knew that the man thus baffled was prepared to go to any lengths; and that being so, he was only too anxious to escape from so dangerous a neighborhood.

Taken up with her own sorrow, Brenda had paid no

attention to the presence or foreboding glance of Van Zwieten, but submitted blindly to be guided through the crowd. All she longed for was to get to some quiet place where she could give way unrestrained to this grief that shook her whole being. And her father instinctively divined what she desired and said no word to comfort her, but hurried her on to the station, and by the judicious bestowal of half a sovereign secured a carriage to themselves. The man touched his hat, and after locking the door, walked off to see if any other person's sorrow would take such tangible and wholly excellent form.

There in the corner of the carriage Brenda lay back and wept for her lost husband, whom—it might be—she would never see again. But she had a great belief in dreams and in the contrariness of this particular dream; and something told her he would come safe and sound out of the hurly-burly of battle. Nevertheless, life seemed very blank to her just then. She wept on unrestrained. Her father paid no attention to her. He was leaning out of the window watching for Van Zwieten. His mind travelled quite as quickly as that of the Dutchman, and he guessed that he would come on to the station on the chance of finding himself and Brenda in the London express.

The inspector came along, unlocked the door, and tried to hustle a couple of weeping women into the carriage; but Mr. Scarse gave his name and whispered that he had engaged the carriage, whereupon the inspector promptly conducted the mourners to another compartment. In his hurry he did not lock the door, which, as it turned out, was unfortunate.

With great anxiety Mr. Scarse watched the minute hand of the station clock crawl round to the hour at which the train was timed to start. He turned hot and cold at the thought that Van Zwieten might come. He had a very shrewd idea of the Dutchman's present mood. But there was no sign of him. And the bell was ringing now for the departure of the express.

"Thank God!" cried Mr. Scarse, throwing himself back into his seat. "We have escaped that villain for the time being at any rate."

Vain congratulation! It was as if he had tempted the gods. Hardly had the train commenced to move when the door of the carriage was dashed open, and Van Zwieten hurled himself into the compartment like a charging buffalo. Brenda uttered a cry of alarm; her father swore—a thing he very seldom permitted himself to do; and the Dutchman, now quite master of his vile temper, smiled blandly and subsided into a seat. He cleared his throat to explain himself. Brenda cast on him one look of ineffable contempt, although she was far from feeling contemptuous, and did so merely out of bravado. Then she drew her veil down and glanced out of the window. If she was forced to travel with him, she was not forced to speak to him; and besides she felt quite safe having her father to protect her, and knowing how different now was his attitude toward the Dutchman. Van Zwieten smiled unpleasantly. He knew well how to rouse her out of that indifference, and he would do so when he judged the proper time had come. Meanwhile he explained himself to the enraged Scarse, whose blood was on fire at the creature's insolence.

"Notwithstanding the very elaborate pains at which you were to reserve this carriage, Scarse, I trust you are sufficiently hospitable not to mind my joining you," he said coolly.

"I mind very much, sir!" cried the other. "How dare you thrust your company where it is not wanted? My daughter and I can dispense with your presence."

"I dare say!" sneered the Dutchman, although he looked surprised at this unexpected resistance on the part of the hitherto meek M. P.; "but you see I have a great deal to say to you and Miss Scarse."

"Mrs. Burton, if you please," Brenda said in a cutting tone.

Van Zwieten bowed his fair head in a cruelly ironical manner. "I beg your pardon, I did not know I was a day after the fair. But it seems to me most strange that you should be married when your father promised me that I should be your husband."

"I did nothing of the sort," said Mr. Scarse, bluntly. "I promised to consent to your marrying my daughter if she chose to have you. But as she had a very distinct preference for Captain Burton, I agreed to that. And I'm glad of it!" he cried with energy; "at least she has married an honorable man!"

"I also am an honorable man. I have kept your secret—up to the present——"

"My secret?" cried the other, contemptuously. "Oh! tell it to whom you please."

Van Zwieten bit his lip to prevent an exhibition of the surprise he felt at this unexpected defiance. "In that case I had better begin with Miss Sca—I beg

your pardon—with Mrs. Burton. She would like to know——"

"She does know," interrupted Brenda, in her clear voice. "There is nothing left for you to tell, Meinherr van Zwieten!"

"Ach! You make me out to be Dutch, then! You are wrong—I am English."

"Quite so; until it suits you to become a Boer."

"We shall see. Oh, you will not have it all your own way in this war, you English. But enough of this," he went on imperiously. "You know, then, that your father and his twin brother killed Mr. Malet?"

"I know nothing of the sort," retorted Brenda, with spirit. "You had better take the case into court and prove your assertion."

"Think of the scandal!"

"I can face all that," cried Mr. Scarse, sharply. "If you think to blackmail me, Van Zwieten, you have come to the wrong person. So far as what I told you is concerned, you are harmless; you can do nothing."

"Perhaps not. I won't even try. But the arrows are not all out of my quiver yet. For you, old man, I care nothing, you cross not my path, so I can spare you; but as for Brenda——"

The girl turned fearlessly upon him. "I will thank you, sir, to address me by my proper name, which is Mrs. Burton!"

Van Zwieten winced. He felt his position intensely, though he put a brave face on it. Brenda saw this, and realized the strain he was putting on himself to keep down his temper.

"Mrs. Burton! Well, let it be so for the present—until you change it for Mrs. van Zwieten."

"That will be never!"

"Oh, yes—when you are a widow."

Brenda shuddered, and fell back on her cushions; but her father leaned forward and shook his fist at the Dutchman. "I am an old man," he said hoarsely, "and you are young and strong, but if you insult my daughter I will strike you! In any case, you will leave the carriage at the next station."

"It is yet a quarter of an hour away," sneered Van Zwieten, looking at his watch, "so that will be time enough to say what I have to say. I do not think you will ask me to go when you hear all?"

"I am not afraid," said Brenda, coolly, "my father is here to protect me. And we are in England, Meinherr van Zwieten, not in your barbarous country of the Transvaal."

"Ah, you English will find it sufficiently civilized in warfare," said the man, savagely. "But I will come to the point. You are married to this Captain Burton. Is that true, or is it not?"

"True? Of course it is true."

"Let me speak, father," put in Brenda. "Yes, it is true. We were married at St. Chad's Church, Brighton, four days ago."

"Just time for a honeymoon—a very short honeymoon," sneered Van Zwieten; but the perspiration was on his face, and the girl could see that he was suffering. She was glad to see it, and continued to speak, knowing that every word she uttered caused the villain intense pain. Callous as Van Zwieten was

in most things, he was a true lover, and suffered only as a strong man like himself could suffer.

"If you like to go to the church you can see the register," she went on carelessly. "My father was present, so was Lady Jenny Malet." She looked him full in the face as she mentioned the name, but he did not flinch. Whatever power Lady Jenny might have over him, he was apparently ignorant of its existence.

"It is a pity you did not ask me," he said, clenching his hands. "I should have completed the happy family party. Well, Burton has escaped now. We shall see if he will be so fortunate in the future."

"Ah! you would murder him—I know it!" said Brenda, scornfully. "But he can take care of himself."

"Very likely, Mrs. Burton; but can he protect himself from the law?"

"What do you mean? That you are going to accuse my husband of Mr. Malet's murder? You are quite capable of it."

"I am; and I can prove that he is guilty."

Mr. Scarse cast an angry glance at the man. "You are a liar, Van Zwieten," he said savagely. "I wonder how I ever came to believe in you. You accuse first me of the crime, then my brother; now it is Harold Burton you would ruin. We are all three innocent."

"Two of you, we will say. But the third is guilty." Van Zwieten spoke slowly, looking at Brenda the while. "I found the pistol with which the murder

was committed. It has a name on the butt. And the name is that of Harold Burton!"

The girl grew deathly pale and clasped her hands. "I do not believe it," she said bravely.

"Well," drawled Van Zwieten, throwing himself back, "I can prove it by showing you the pistol—it is at my rooms in Duke Street. If you choose to come there—with your father, of course—you can see it. Yes, you may look and look; but your husband and no other killed Malet."

"It is false. There was no reason why Harold should kill Mr. Malet."

"Oh, pardon me, I think he had a very good reason," corrected Van Zwieten, blandly; "at least Captain Burton thought it a sufficient reason when I told him what I knew at Chippingholt."

"Ah!" flashed out Mrs. Burton, "so this was what you told Harold to make him leave without saying good-bye to me!"

"It was. I showed him the pistol, and he admitted that it was his——"

"But not that he had used it!"

"You are very sharp, Mrs. Burton; but that is just what he did confess."

"I don't believe it!" cried the girl.

"Nor I," joined in Mr. Scarse. "You are speaking falsely."

Van Zwieten shrugged his mighty shoulders. "As you please," said he. "If I show it to the lawyers you may find that what I say is true. If it was not true how could I have made Harold Burton leave Chippingholt? Why did he keep his marriage with

you a secret? Because he feared what I had to say about him. I had decided not to betray him if he left the lady to me. As it is, I shall speak."

"As you choose!" said Brenda. "You can prove no motive for such a crime. Harold left Chippinghold because you told him that Mr. Malet had gambled away his twenty thousand pounds, and the poor dear did not want to tell me of his loss."

"Oh, yes, I told him that also. I knew more of Malet's private affairs than you think. But Burton did not know the money was lost at the time he murdered Malet. He murdered him to get it."

"You speak very confidently," returned Brenda, ironically. "You will now of course put the matter into the hands of the police."

"Well, no; I shall not do that just now. However, as I see you do not believe me, I should like to give you an opportunity of changing your mind. Come with your father to my rooms in St. James's to-morrow and I will show you the revolver."

"I dare say you have the weapon," put in Mr. Scarse; "but how do we know where you found it?"

"I can prove that. Come to-morrow and convince yourselves. Then I will make my terms."

"Your terms?"

"Yes. My silence must be bought—but not with money. You, Mrs. Burton, must give me your promise to marry me when you become a widow."

"I am not a widow yet," said Brenda, trying hard to keep up her courage, "and, please God, I shall never be!"

"Amen!" sneered Van Zwieten, as the train slowed down, "we shall see. But I hold the winning card, and I intend to play it for my own benefit. Here we are, so I will leave you now. To-morrow at three I shall be at my rooms. If you do not come I will see the police about the matter."

"Very good," said Brenda, much to her father's surprise. "I will be there."

"Come now, you are sensible!" sneered Van Zwieten; "I shall make something out of you yet, Mrs. Burton."

"Get out!" shouted Mr. Scarse, fiercely, "or I'll throw you out!"

"Ah, bad temper, Scarse. Keep that for those who are fighting our Republics. *Au revoir* until to-morrow," and Van Zwieten, jumping lightly out of the compartment, made for a smoking-carriage.

"Why did you agree to meet the blackguard?" fumed Mr. Scarse when the train was moving off again. "You know he is lying!"

"No, I don't think he is."

"What? do you believe your husband guilty?"

"I wouldn't believe it if an angel from heaven told me so!" flashed out Mrs. Harold Burton. "But Van Zwieten has this revolver with Harold's name on it or he would not dare to speak so confidently. I will find out where he got it. He might have stolen it from Harold, or he might have had the name put on the silver plate. Harold is not here to contradict him. To-morrow we will take Wilfred with us. He will know if the revolver is Harold's or not. In the meantime I will see Lady Jenny. Harold told me to

go to her if Mr. van Zwieten made himself disagreeable. The time seems to have come."

"But what can she do?"

"I don't know; but that is what I must find out. We will baffle this man yet. Oh, father, and to think that you once wanted me to marry him!"

"I was wrong, my dear, very wrong," Mr. Scarse said penitently; "but at any rate you are married now to the man of your choice."

"Harold, my darling!" Brenda's tears burst out afresh. "God knows if I shall ever see him again!" She wept bitterly. Truly, poor Brenda was hard beset.

Meantime Van Zwieten was swearing at his own stupidity in not having kept a sharper eye on Harold. But he had not expected the young man—whom he had regarded as his victim—to display such daring. At Chippingholt he had warned him that if he married Brenda he would denounce him. Well, he had married Brenda, and was now well beyond reach on his way to Africa. More than ever was Van Zwieten determined that he should pay for what he had done. He had but exchanged the gallows in England for a Boer bullet in South Africa. Then, when he was no more, his widow should become Mrs. van Zwieten. That he swore should be. He had failed once, he would not fail again. From Waterloo he went to Westminster, to get the revolver and take it to his rooms, that he might have it ready for production on the morrow.

On arrival there he was met by Mrs. Hicks. She was in the greatest distress. "Oh, sir!" she cried, "a

policeman's been here, and has taken a box from your room—an iron box!"

For the moment Van Zwieten stood stunned. Then he rushed upstairs and looked on the top of the press. The box was gone!

CHAPTER XVII.

CHECKMATED.

STRONG man as he was, Van Zwieten reeled half-fainting against the wall. It was true—the box was gone! In a flash he realized his peril. For that box held little that was not of a highly compromising nature. Once its contents were seen by the authorities —as it would seem they must be—he would be arrested as a spy, imprisoned, perhaps hanged. No ingenuity or lying on his part could explain away the damning evidence of the papers. They spoke for themselves.

What a fool he had been not to have forwarded them to Leyds in the morning as he had intended to do. Now it was too late, and nothing remained but to fly to Pretoria and to throw in his lot openly with his employers. Useless now to think of going out as correspondent to an English newspaper, even were he able to manage his escape from London. Those in command at the front would surely be advised of his true character by the home authorities; and not only that, but he would be unmasked in a country under military law, where a spy such as he would receive but short shrift. Fly he must, and that at once. He must get to the Continent, and take ship for Delagoa Bay. The game was up in England; there remained now only the Transvaal.

After the first emotion of terror had passed, Van

Zwieten collected his wits and set to work to find some way out of the difficulty. Had he been in Russia or France he would have given himself up to despair, for there the authorities were lynx-eyed and relentless. But here in England he was amongst a people so firmly wedded to their old-fashioned laws as to freedom and justice that they might fail to take the strong measures which the situation, so far as they were concerned, demanded. He would baffle these pig-headed islanders yet, and, with a courage born of despair, he set himself to the accomplishment of this design.

Mrs. Hicks, pale and tearful, had followed him into the room and had been witness of his despair. The poor woman was too much agitated to speak. This unexpected invasion of her quiet house by the police had been altogether too much for her. Van Zwieten made her sit down, and proceeded to question her. With many tears and lamentations that she had no husband to protect her, she gave him all the necessary details, and he listened with feverish anxiety to every word.

"It was about midday, Mr. Jones," said Mrs. Hicks; "yes, I will not deceive you, sir, the clock was just on twelve when I heard a ring at the door. I left Mary Anne in the kitchen and went to see who it was. There was a hansom at the door, sir, and standing on the mat there was a policeman and a lady."

"A lady?" put in Van Zwieten, looking rather puzzled, for he could not guess what woman could have interfered with his affairs. He had always kept himself clear of the sex. "What lady?"

"I don't rightly know her name, Mr. Jones, for, to be plain with you, she never gave it to me. She was a short lady, sir, with black hair and eyes—as black as your hat, sir."

"Dressed in mourning?" asked the Dutchman, with a sudden flash of intuition.

"As you say, sir—dressed in mourning, and beautifully made it was, too. She asked if Mr. Jones lived here, and if he was at home. I said you did lodge with me, sir, having no reason to hide it, but that you were out. The lady stepped into the passage then with the policeman."

"What was the policeman like?"

"Tall and handsome, with big black eyes and a black beard. He was something like the gentleman who came to see you last night. I beg pardon, did you speak, sir?"

But Van Zwieten had not spoken. He had uttered a groan rather of relief than otherwise. The thing was not so bad after all. In the lady he recognized the wife of Mr. Malet, though why she should have come to raid his rooms was more than he could understand. The policeman he had no difficulty in recognizing as Wilfred Burton in a new disguise. Without doubt it was he who had brought Lady Jenny Malet to the Westminster rooms. And Wilfred knew, too, of the existence of the box with its compromising contents, of which Van Zwieten himself had been foolish enough to tell him on the previous night, out of a sheer spirit of bravado—bravado which he bitterly regretted when it was too late. He swore now in his beard, at his own folly, and at Wilfred's daring.

However, now that he could feel tolerably sure that the authorities had nothing to do with the seizure of his papers, he felt more at ease. After all, these private enemies might be baffled, but of this he was not so sure as he had been. The several checks which had recently happened to him had made him feel less sure of himself.

"Well, Mrs. Hicks," he said, rousing himself from his meditations, "and what did these people do?"

Mrs. Hicks threw her apron over her head and moaned. "Oh, sir!" she said, in muffled tones, which came from under her apron, "they told me that you were a dangerous man, and that the Government had sent the policeman to search your rooms. The lady said she knew you well, and did not want to make a public scandal, so she had brought the policeman to do it quietly. She asked me for the key, and said if I did not give it up she would bring in a dozen more policemen—and that would have ruined me, sir!"

"And you believed her?" cried Van Zwieten, cursing her for a fool.

Mrs. Hicks whipped the apron off her head and looked at her lodger in wide-eyed amazement. "Of course I did," she said; "I'm that afraid of the police as never was. Many a time have I feared when I saw poor Hicks—who is dead and gone—in the hands of the constables for being drunk, poor lamb! I wouldn't resist the police; would you, sir?"

"Never mind," he said, seeing it was useless to argue with her. "You let them into my rooms, I suppose?"

"As you may guess, sir, me being a law-abiding

woman, though the taxes are that heavy. Yes, sir, I took them up to your room and left them there."

"Ach! what did you do that for?"

"I could not help myself, sir. The policeman ordered me to go away, and it was not for me to disobey the law. I left them there for twenty minutes, and then I came up to see what they were doing. The policeman had gone and so had the cab, though I swear to you, Mr. Jones, that I never heard it drive away. The lady was sitting, cool as you like, at your desk there, writing."

"What was she writing?"

"That, sir, I don't rightly know, as she put her letter into an envelope, and here it is."

He snatched the letter Mrs. Hicks produced from her pocket, and said something not very complimentary to that good woman's brains. She was indignant, and would fain have argued with him, but he silenced her with a gesture, and hurriedly read the letter. As he had already guessed, the writer was Lady Jenny Malet; and she merely asked him to call at her house in Curzon Street for explanations. So she put it, somewhat ironically perhaps, and Van Zwieten swore once again —this time at the phrase. He put the letter in his pocket, determined to accept the invitation, and to have it out with this all too clever lady. Meanwhile Mrs. Hicks rose to make a speech.

"I have to give you notice, sir," she said in her most stately tones, "as I have not been in the habit of letting my rooms to folk as is wanted by the police. You will be pleased to leave this day week, which, I believe, was the agreement."

"I intend to leave this day," retorted her lodger. "I told you I was going, and I have not seen fit to alter my decision. I will send for my furniture this afternoon, and I will pay your account now."

"Thank you, sir. I shall be most obliged, and I think you should pay me extra for the disgrace you have brought on my house. Oh," wailed Mrs. Hicks, "to think I should have lodged murderers and forgers!"

Van Zwieten started at the word "murderer," but he recovered himself quickly. He dismissed her with a shrug. "Go down and make your account out," he said. "You have done mischief enough already."

"Oh, indeed!" cried the woman, shrilly. "I do like you, sir, disgracing my honest house, and then turning on me! I have been deceived in you, Mr. Jones; never again will I let my lodgings to mysterious gentlemen. And when they put you in the dock, sir, I'll come and see you hanged!" and with this incoherent speech Mrs. Hicks tottered out of the room.

Left alone, Van Zwieten lost no time in vain lamentation. He had been beaten by his enemies for the present; he could only wait to see if the tide of war would turn. It would be necessary to make terms with Lady Jenny and Wilfred, for they now possessed the evidences of his employment in England. But on his side he could use his knowledge of the murder and of Harold's connection with it—as witness the revolver—to keep them quiet. If they could bite, so could he.

Meanwhile he gathered together his personal belong-

ings and packed them; he left the drawers of his desk empty, and he put the clothes of Mr. Jones into a large trunk. By the time Mrs. Hicks arrived with her bill he was quite ready. Nor had he left any evidence which would identify Mr. Jones of Westminster with Mr. van Zwieten of St. James's. Beaten he might be, but he would retreat in good order.

"This is my bill, sir," said Mrs. Hicks. "I have charged nothing for the disgrace to my house!"

"Just as well," retorted he. "You would gain nothing by that. There is the money—in cash. I suppose you would prefer it to my check."

"Well, sir," said Mrs. Hicks, softened somewhat by the gold, "you have always paid up like a gentleman, I will say, and I hope they won't hang you!"

"Thank you," said Van Zwieten, drily, as he fastened his glove; "that is very kind of you. I will see after my furniture this afternoon. Is there a cab at the door? All right. Send the man up for my luggage. And, Mrs. Hicks"—he turned on her, as Mrs. Hicks described it afterward, like a tiger—"it will be as well for you to hold your tongue about this business. By the way, how did you know the policeman took away my box?"

"Mary Anne was watching on the stairs, sir, and she saw the policeman come down with it," said the landlady, with dignity. "Oh, I won't say anything, sir, you may be sure. I only want to keep away from the law. I hope you'll be as lucky!" and Mrs. Hicks bowed her suspicious guest out of the house. She was immensely relieved when she saw his cab drive round the corner.

In another ten minutes Mr. Jones was transformed into Mr. van Zwieten, and was established in his rooms in Duke Street, St. James's. But he had no intention of staying there long. The place was evidently too hot to hold him, or would be unless he could threaten and bully Lady Jenny and Wilfred into surrender of that precious box. In any event, his great desire was to go south. His work in England was done, and well done. Even Leyds acknowledged that. But for Van Zwieten's report of the rusty condition of the British army; the out-of-date ordnance; the little way these islanders had of putting incompetent men in office, to be rendered still more incompetent by an antiquated system of red-tapeism; and the inconceivable folly practiced of allowing the civil power to override the opinion of military experts; but for all these things the Republics—well armed though they were—would not have declared war. The world was amazed at their daring. But their two Presidents knew what they were about, and so did Leyds. His business it was to spread reports which would gain the sympathy of the Continental Powers; that of the burghers to hurl themselves on the British, all unprepared as they were through the folly of the peace party. Now that the glove had been thrown down, Van Zwieten was all eagerness to get to the front. How useful he could be to his adopted country at this juncture! But were he in the British camp as war correspondent to an English newspaper, his usefulness would be trebled. And now it seemed as though his enemies were to upset all these plans by this one coup!

However, there was nothing for it now but to face

them bravely and learn the worst. Then he could take what steps were possible to frustrate them.

Meanwhile Brenda was pouring out her troubles to Lady Jenny Malet and telling her all about Van Zwieten and his threats. She had gone there full of anxiety to enlist the little widow's sympathies, and of indignation at the charge made by the Dutchman against Harold. Having made herself as clear as she knew how, and having related all the facts, she waited with some impatience for Lady Jenny's opinion, which was not immediately forthcoming. Indeed, it was some time before she spoke.

The drawing-room was both tastefully and extravagantly furnished. Lady Jenny might be a spendthrift, but she was also an artist, and alas! her period of splendor was drawing to a close. Already Chippingholt Manor had been sold to gratify the greedy creditors of its late owner. The house in Curzon Street was her own property under her marriage settlement, and this with ten thousand pounds from the insurance office was all she had in the world. So by the advice of her lawyer she had invested the money and let the house furnished. Now she was going abroad to practice economy in some continental town. All her plans were made; and this was the last week of her prosperity. She only lingered in England at the express request of Wilfred, who had made her promise to help him all she could to trap Van Zwieten. Brenda had come on the same errand; and now Lady Jenny sat and pondered how much she could tell her about the man.

"Do speak to me," said Brenda. "I am so afraid for Harold."

"You need not be," replied the widow, and her visitor noticed how worried and haggard she looked. "He is perfectly safe, I assure you. Van Zwieten shall not harm him!"

"But he accuses him of committing the murder!"

"So you said. But that doesn't matter. Whoever killed poor Gilbert it was not Harold Burton."

"Tell me how Harold's revolver came to be found on the spot?"

"I have an idea, but I cannot tell you—at all events, not just yet. Wait till I have seen Van Zwieten."

"Are you going to see him?"

"I think so—to-night, about nine o'clock. At least I left a note at his rooms which I think will bring him. I can only say that if he is a wise man he will come. Then I will settle him once and for all as far as Harold is concerned."

"Lady Jenny, tell me who do you think killed your husband?"

She looked at the girl sharply. "Did your father ever tell you he had a brother?" she asked.

"Yes, he told me all about it; and how your wicked husband ran away with his wife! I beg your pardon, I should not speak so of Mr. Malet."

"You need not apologize," the widow said bitterly, "Gilbert deserves all the names you could have called him. He was a bad man; and even though he is dead, and though he was punished by a violent death, I have not forgiven him."

"Oh, don't say that; it is wrong!"

"I know it is, but I can't help it. I have southern blood in my veins, and I never forgive. I am glad your father told you the truth—it saves me from having to repeat a very painful story. That poor uncle of yours told me all about it, and how Gilbert had deceived and ill-treated his wife. I asked my husband, and he denied the story; but I saw the woman myself and made certain it was true. Then I hated Gilbert. Not for that only—there were other things. Before he married me, and after, he deceived me. I could have taken his punishment into my own hands, but I felt sure that Heaven would check his wicked career. But to go on with my story. That night I got a note from your uncle telling me that his wife was dead. I saw Gilbert in the library and showed him the letter. It was just before he went out. I reminded him that the man—and a madman at that—was hanging about the place. The boy who brought the letter had told me so, and I warned him against going out. He laughed at me, and was most insulting. Then he went, and I never saw him again until his body was brought in. I knew then that the vengeance of Heaven had fallen!"

Brenda looked at her with a white face. "What do you mean?" she asked in a whisper.

"Child, can you not guess? It was Robert who had killed him!"

"Impossible!" cried Brenda. "My father found my uncle and took him home with him. At the time of the murder Uncle Robert was in our cottage."

"Is this true?" said the widow, and a bright color

came into her face. "Then who was the man talking to Gilbert in the library? There was some one with him just before nine o'clock. I was going to the Rectory to meet Harold about your business, and I went to the library to see if Gilbert had come back. I was afraid of Robert Scarse and of what he might do, half crazed as he was by his wife's death. Little as I loved my husband, I did not want that to happen. The door of the room was locked, but I heard voices. I went out without thinking any more about it. Oh, I swear to you, Brenda, that I have always believed it was your uncle who killed him! Who was it then? The revolver!—ah! and Van Zwieten has it!" She jumped up and clasped her hands. "I see! I know! I know!"

"What?" asked the girl, rising in alarm.

"Never mind—never mind. I will tell you soon. Go now, Brenda, and leave me to see Van Zwieten. Oh, I know how to manage him now!"

"Is it him you mean?"

"He is worse than a murderer," Lady Jenny cried. "He is a spy!"

"I was sure of it. But how do you know?"

"I know; and I can't tell you how. As to the murder, he has to do with that too. I believe he did it himself."

"But how do you know?" repeated Brenda. "How do you know?"

"No matter. I am sure he fired that shot, and I can prove it."

"Prove it, and hang him!" cried Brenda, and there was bitter hatred in her voice.

The little widow sat down again, and the fire died out of her eyes. "No, I cannot hang him, even though he is guilty. There are things—oh, I can't tell you. The man must go unpunished for the sake of—go away, child, and leave it all to me."

"But I want to know the truth—I must save Harold!"

"*I* will save Harold. He is safe from Van Zwieten. As to the truth, you shall know it when once he is out of the country."

Brenda had to be satisfied with this, for her friend absolutely refused to tell her any more. But she left feeling that her husband was safe from the intrigues of the Dutchman, and that was all she cared about.

Left alone, Lady Jenny clenched her hands.

"If I could only hang him!" she muttered. "But that is impossible!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

EXIT VAN ZWIETEN.

As Lady Jenny had expected, Mr. van Zwieten proved himself to be a wise man by presenting himself in her drawing-room at the appointed hour. He was in evening dress, calm and composed as usual, and greeted her with a low bow. She could not help admiring his self-possession. His reputation, his liberty even, was at stake, and yet he never turned a hair. And with these feelings uppermost, she received him more kindly, perhaps, than she would otherwise have done. The Dutchman, taking his cue from her, that the conversation, despite its probable sensational character, was not to be conducted on melodramatic lines, reciprocated her politeness. Any one seeing the pair might have imagined that they were discussing nothing of more importance than "Shakespeare and the musical glasses," rather than a subject which, to one of them, at least, meant life or death.

The hostess, in a black silk dinner dress, with a few well-chosen jewels, looked unusually pretty in the light of the lamps, and Van Zwieten was an admirer of pretty women, and knew well how to make himself agreeable to them. Had the subject-matter of their conversation been only less serious, he would have enjoyed himself. As it was, he did not find the hour he spent with her irksome. For a few moments the two

antagonists discussed general topics, and then Lady Jenny came suddenly to the point. The man watched her warily. Pretty she might be, but that was no reason why he should allow her to get the better of him. It was a duel of words, and the combatants were well matched.

"Well, Mr. van Zwieten," began the widow, "I suppose you were somewhat astonished at my invitation."

"I cannot deny that I was, my dear lady. It is, perhaps, a trifle disconcerting to find one's rooms robbed, and then to receive an invitation from the robber!"

"Oh, come, that is rather harsh, is it not? It was what I should call simple justice."

"Indeed!" replied the other, dryly. "It would interest me to learn how you make that out."

"Oh, easily. I can give you two reasons. In the first place, you threatened—did you not?—to accuse a man of a crime which you knew he had not committed. In the second, you are a spy, to put it plainly, and both Wilfred Burton and I felt it was our duty to secure proofs of your guilt. We are not *all* fools in this country!"

"That is a charge one would hardly bring against you," returned Van Zwieten, with emphasis, "nor against that young man. Had I suspected him of so much cleverness, I should have taken more elaborate precautions."

"Ah! you should never undervalue your enemies! Well, I suppose you know that you are in my power?"

"And in Wilfred Burton's also!"

"No. I can manage him. He has left the decision of this matter in my hands. I am sure you ought to be pleased at that!"

"I am. Because I see you mean to let me off."

"That depends!" she said, and shot a keen glance at him. "I asked you to come here because it was necessary that I should see you, sir—but I despise you none the less for that. You are a spy!—the meanest of all created creatures."

Van Zwieten held up his hand. He was quite unmoved. "My dear lady, let us come to business. Believe me, preaching of that kind has very little effect on me. I might defend myself by saying that I have every right to use craft on behalf of the Transvaal fox against the mighty English lion, but I will content myself with holding my tongue. I would remind you that I have very little time to spare. I intend to leave this country to-morrow morning."

"How do you know that I shall allow you to go?"

"You would hardly have invited me to this interview else," Van Zwieten said cunningly. "You have something you want from me. Well, I will give it in exchange for my safety—and that includes, of course, your silence."

"It is clever of you to put it that way," responded the widow, coolly. "It so happens that you are right. I intend to make a bargain with you."

"Always provided that I agree."

"Of course," said she, airily; "but in this case I really think you *will* agree."

"I am not so sure of that." Van Zwieten narrowed

his eyes and blinked wickedly. "You forget that I also know something."

"For that reason I asked you here. Let me advise you not to pit yourself against me, my good man, or you may get the worst of it. A word from me and you would be kicking your heels in jail this very night."

"Probably." Van Zwieten had too much to gain to notice her threat. "But you will never say that word."

"You can't be quite sure of that yet. Well, let us get to business. I am not anxious to spend any more time in your company than is necessary."

"I assure you the feeling is mutual. May I ask how you found my rooms in Westminster?"

"I think you know that very well after the visitor you received last night. I was told about them and you by Mr. Wilfred Burton. He knew long ago that you were a spy, and he has been watching you for many months."

"He is not so very clever then. All these months —and yet he has got no further than this!"

"How much further do you want him to go? He has the box with all your papers—your treasonable papers—your orders from Dr. Leyds. Really, Mr. van Zwieten, you should have taken a little more care of that box! The top of a press was hardly a safe place to hide it. But perhaps you had been reading Poe's story of the 'Purloined Letter.'"

"Never mind what I read," he said, evidently annoyed at her flippancy. "Let us confine ourselves to business. The idea of the disguised policeman was yours, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, it was. I felt sure that the landlady would not let us enter your room to make the search unless she was thoroughly frightened, so I suggested that he should get himself up as a member of the force. Our little stratagem succeeded to perfection. Mrs. Hicks—that is her name, I believe—was terrified and let us in at once. Then we found your box, and I sent Wilfred away with it while I stayed and wrote my note to you. Oh, what a time we had over your papers! You really are very clever, Mr. van Zwieten. What a lot the Foreign Secretary would give to see what we saw; and, as it happens, he is a personal friend of mine. I might sell it, you know," she went on coolly. "I am poor enough now, and they would give me a good price."

"Not such a price as would recompense you for what I could say about your husband," retorted the Dutchman.

She laughed gaily. "Oh, that? My good man, I know all about that! Do you think I should have taken the trouble to talk to you if I had not known that my husband had been doing all your dirty work?"

"Yes, he did my work," Van Zwieten said viciously. "He was my creature—paid by me with Transvaal gold. You call *me* a spy, Lady Jane Malet. Your own husband was one—and not only a spy, but a traitor!"

"I know it," she said, and her face was very pale, "and for that reason I am glad he is dead, terrible though his end was."

"I dare say you helped him out of the world!" sneered Van Zwieten.

"That is false, and you know it. I had no idea of what my husband was until I found his papers after his death. Had I known that when he was yet alive, I *might* have killed him!" She clenched her hand. "Yes, I might have shot him, the mean, cowardly hound! He spoke against the Boers, and yet he took their money!"

"Oh, you must not blame him for that. That was my idea."

"It is worthy of you. Oh!"—she started up and paced the room in a fury—"to think that I should have been married to such a creature! To think that I should have lived on gold paid for the betrayal of my country! The cur! The Judas! Thank God he is dead." And then, turning abruptly on the Dutchman, "How did you gain him over to your side?" she asked. "Gilbert was a man once—a man and a gentleman. How did you contrive to make him a—a —thing?"

"Easily enough," he said placidly. He could not understand why she made all this fuss. "Two years ago I met him at Monte Carlo. I watched him gamble and lose. I heard he was in the War Office, or had some connection with it, so I made his acquaintance and induced him to play still higher. We became intimate enough to discuss money matters—his, of course—and he told me that he was very hard up. He blamed you."

"I dare say," returned Lady Jenny, coldly. "Go on."

"Well, I put the matter to him delicately. I asked him to find out certain details connected with your

military organization, and I told him he would be well paid for the information. I am bound to say he kicked at first, but I went on tempting him with bigger sums; and he was so desperately hard up that he closed with me in the end. He soon did all I wanted, and, once in my power, I trained him to be most useful, but I kept on paying him well—oh, yes, I paid him very well."

He made this villainous confession in so cool a tone that Lady Jenny could have struck him. It was horrible to think that she had been the wife of so degraded a creature as Van Zwieten now described her husband to have been, and, "Thank God he is dead!" she cried again. "It would have been worse for both of us if I had known it while he was alive. It might have been I, then, who would have fired the shot. But after all, I suppose it was better that he should fall by your hand!"

The Dutchman started from his seat. "I am a spy, Lady Jenny," he cried, "but I am not a murderer. I leave that sort of thing to you!"

"To me? Do you accuse me of the murder of my husband?"

"I do. Captain Burton, while staying at your house at Chippingholt, left his revolvers behind. You found them; you took one and stole out after your husband and shot him. I found the weapon. Do you take me for a fool? Where were you when you pretended to go to the Rectory?—out in the orchards tracking your husband! You killed him because he was in love with Mrs. Scarse. Deny it if you can!"

"I do deny it. It was all over between him and

Mrs. Scarse before he married me. He cared so little for the poor woman that he did not go to her when she was dying. That madman, her husband, came down to tell Gilbert of her death. They met and had a struggle. I thought it was he who had killed him; and indeed, if he had, I should not have blamed him. As it was, you were the man—you, who wanted to get rid of your tool!"

Van Zwieten threw himself back in his chair with a laugh. "You talk nonsense," he said roughly. "Why should I want to get rid of a man who was useful to me? No one was more sorry than I when poor Malet died. Not from any sentimental point of view—oh, dear no!—but because he had become quite a necessary person to me. I found the revolver in the grass, but it was not I who had used it. If I had," he added cynically, "I should have no hesitation in telling you."

"You *did* murder him!" insisted Lady Jenny, fiercely. "I know where you found the revolver—not, as you say, on the grass—no! it was in the library on the night of the murder. Gilbert had been shooting at a mark in the afternoon; and at night—at nine o'clock—I heard voices in the library. It was you who were with him; you, who came to take away treasonable papers from my unhappy husband. You got what you wanted, and you got the weapon, and he went back with you to Mr. Scarse's cottage. You wanted to get rid of him without danger to yourself; you tried to lay the guilt on Harold Burton to rid yourself of a rival! You shot Gilbert in the orchards, and you threw away the revolver to implicate Harold and walked

back to the cottage; you—you murderer!—you Cain!"

She stopped, half choked by her emotions. Van Zwieten seized the opportunity to deny once again the truth of her accusation.

"I tell you I did not kill Malet!"

"Then who did?"

"I don't know. I thought it was Captain Burton; upon my soul I did!"

"Have you a soul?" Lady Jenny asked with scorn. "I should doubt it. However, I stick to my opinion —I believe that you killed my husband. Oh, you need not look alarmed, I am not going to give you up. I have done all I wanted—I have married Harold to Brenda by telling him I could keep you from accusing him of the murder!"

"And can you?" sneered Van Zwieten. He was fighting every inch.

"I am sure I can. I have your box, remember. For my husband's sake I spare you now. I don't want an honorable name to be smirched through him. I don't want to be pointed at as the widow of a spy and a traitor, otherwise I would denounce you as the spy and the murderer I truly believe you to be. This is my bargain, Mr. van Zwieten. You leave England at once, cease to persecute Captain Burton and his wife and I will hold my tongue."

"And if I refuse?" he asked sullenly.

"If you refuse I will have you arrested as you leave this house. You think I can't do that, but I can. I have made all my preparations. I have left nothing to chance. One does not leave things to chance in

dealing with a man like you, Mr. van Zwieten," she sneered. "Wilfred Burton is outside with a couple of policemen. I have only to whistle and they will come up."

But Van Zwieten was not so easily bluffed. "On what grounds, may I ask?" he said. "If you wanted to keep this matter quiet for the sake of your husband, you would not have told the police."

"I have told them nothing about your spying business," she said calmly. "You will be arrested on a charge of being concerned in the murder of my husband, and I can assure you that if you are so arrested I will press the charge. On the other hand, if you agree to my terms, I will let you go free. I can easily make things right with the police by telling them that I have been mistaken. Oh, all this is not regular, I know; but I have some little political influence, and I am using it for my own benefit—and for yours, if it comes to that."

He looked at her savagely. Had he obeyed his inclinations he would have wrung her neck. It was gall and wormwood to him to be beaten so thoroughly by a woman. But being in England, and not in a country like the Transvaal, where such a trifling matter as murder would be winked at, he had to suppress his homicidal desires. Quickly reviewing the situation, he could see nothing for it but to yield to the superior power of the enemy. Twist and wriggle as he might, there was no chance of escaping from the trap she had prepared for him. The game was up and there remained only the Transvaal.

"Well!" Lady Jenny asked imperiously, "what

have you to say? Will you give me your promise to leave Brenda and her husband unmolested and to leave England at once, or will you allow yourself to be arrested and have all the world know what manner of life yours has been?"

"If you had me exposed, you also would suffer."

"My husband's name would be smirched. I know that, but I am prepared to run that risk. If I had the misfortune to be the wife of a scoundrel, that was not my fault. But I am getting tired of all this. I give you five minutes to make up your mind."

Van Zwieten assumed a cheerful demeanor. He would take the sting of this defeat by accepting it with a good grace. "There is no need for me to consider the matter, dear lady," he said, "I am willing to accept your terms."

"Very good. Then you leave England ——"

"To-morrow morning."

"And you will make no further accusations against Captain Burton?"

"No. It would appear that he is innocent."

"And you will not annoy his wife?"

"Since she is his wife, I will promise that also."

"In that case I need detain you no longer, Mr. van Zwieten."

"One moment. My papers; what about them? Am I not to have them?"

The audacity of this demand took away the little woman's breath. "No! Certainly not," she replied sharply. "I should lose my hold over you if I gave them up. Besides, you have given quite enough in-

formation to your friend Dr. Leyds. You shall not give any more if I can help it."

"Then what security have I that you will let me go free?"

"You have my word. And, after all, there are no guarantees on either side. What security have I for your silence save the holding of these papers? I know very well that as soon as you think you are safe you will do what injury you can to Captain Burton. But I can thwart you there too, Mr. van Zwieten. Your wish is to go to the British camp as a war correspondent. You would betray all our plans to the enemy. Well, sir, I forbid you to stay with my countrymen. If I hear—as I assuredly will hear—that you are in our camp, I will at once disclose the contents of the box, and instructions shall be sent to the front for your arrest. I can checkmate you on every point."

"What about Captain Burton's life? You can't protect that. If you drive me to join the Boers, I can easily have him shot."

Seeing there was no more to be said, he rose to go. At the door he paused. "You have forced me to consent to what you wished," he said, "as I can do nothing against the power you have unlawfully gained over me by stealing my papers. But I give you fair warning that I love Brenda madly, and that I intend to make her my wife in spite of Captain Burton. Once in the Transvaal, I shall join hands openly with my adopted country. Then let Burton look to himself, for I will do my best to make his wife a widow."

"The future is in the hands of God," Lady Jenny said solemnly. "You can go, Mr. van Zwieten."

He bowed ironically and went without another word. He was glad to have escaped so easily; for, after all, he could do as he liked when he was beyond the reach of pursuit. Once he was in the Transvaal, Lady Jenny might show the papers as much as she wished. Had she been wise, he thought, she would have kept him as a hostage. But she had let her chance slip, and he was free to plot and scheme. Needless to say, he intended to keep none of the promises he had made.

Then he went out into the night, slipped past three men, whom he recognized as Wilfred and the constables, and so took his departure like a whipped hound.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TERRIBLE LETTER.

THEN succeeded a period of waiting and heart-breaking expectation, which Brenda, in common with many of her fellow-countrymen, bore with quiet heroism. Glencoe, Elandslaagte, Rietfontein were fought, and victory crowned the British arms; but the triumphs were only achieved at a bitter cost.

The eyes of the world were eagerly fixed on this first example of modern warfare since the Franco-German campaign; and the military experts of Europe were anxious to learn how the use of scientific weapons of terrible destructive force would affect the warfare of the future. It was soon seen that battles would resolve themselves into artillery duels, since no human beings could stand up against the hail of shot and shell hurled incessantly from repeating machines such as the Mauser, Nordenfelt and Maxim. That the British troops should brave the fury of this death-storm proved to the onlooking world how brightly the valor for their sires burned in their hearts. Even the grudging critics of the Continent could not withhold their tribute of admiration at this matchless daring.

Mr. Scarse had taken a small house, and Brenda lived with him. They had been very happy together since their reconciliation—as happy, at least, as they

could be while Harold was at the front. He was with Buller, who, sheltered behind the Tugela River, had not yet commenced to move. How eagerly Brenda scanned the papers through those days of suspense! Wilfred had gone out as a war correspondent, and when his brilliant letters appeared, with what delight she read them over and over again. Mr. Scarse still denounced the war as an unjust one, and unnecessary to boot, and said so in public when he could. Seeing it was useless to attempt to alter her father's views, Brenda never mentioned the subject; and so they got on very well together. Occasionally there came a letter from Harold; then Brenda was happy for the day, for he always wrote full of hope and courage.

Lady Jenny Malet still lingered in England. She had let her Curzon Street house and was staying at a quiet hotel. Knowing, as she did, that Van Zwieten was not wholly crushed, she did not feel inclined to leave the country until she felt tolerably certain that Harold was safe from him. His box she kept in her own possession and showed to no one. Only in the event of Van Zwieten playing the traitor in Natal would she produce them. For no other reason would she smirch the memory of her husband. She had arranged with Wilfred that, if the spy were found in the British camp, information should be sent to her at once. Then she would see the authorities, and he should be dealt with according to martial law. She explained this to Brenda.

"Wilfred is with Harold," she said, "and he will look after him. Van Zwieten knows that on the first

sign of his breaking his promise I shall not spare him."

"But how will that affect him out there?" the girl asked dolefully.

"It won't affect him if he is openly on the side of the enemy; but if he is spying in the British camps he will be taken and shot. I don't think he can be with General Buller or Wilfred would have denounced him. He is probably at the Modder."

"But he may be with the enemy?"

"He may be. I have heard nothing of him since he left London. He went over to the Continent—so Wilfred found out—and sailed in a German liner for Delagoa Bay. Yes, he might be with the Boer forces, but I doubt it."

"Why do you doubt it?"

"My dear, Van Zwieten can do no harm to your husband except by treachery. Of course he might shoot him, or have him shot in open battle; but, after all, there would not be the same amount of certainty about that as there would be if he were to get rid of him by underhand means."

"It is terrible!" cried Brenda, wringing her hands. "I don't mind Harold fighting as a soldier should—all the other men are doing the same—but to have a private enemy like Van Zwieten is dreadful."

"I don't think he will find it so easy to do Harold any harm. After all, Brenda, your husband is no fool, and he is on his guard."

"I do wish I could go out to the front."

"With what object? You could do nothing to protect him, and he would only worry about you. Better

stay at home, my dear, and try to possess your soul in patience. It is hard, I know; but remember you are not the only one."

Brenda took the advice, and strove to calm herself by constant occupation. She made every sort of comfort she could think of for her husband, and sent him everything that might by the remotest chance be useful to him. This was her great solace, and her father, seeing how it cheered her, gave her every encouragement. But it was a terrible time. Every day brought some fresh sorrow. The Belmont and Graspan victories cheered the nation somewhat; but a period of gloom succeeded, and news came of Gatacre's reverse and the failure of Buller to cross the Tugela. It was then that the suspense became almost too much for Mrs. Burton, for Harold was in the thick of the fighting, and on the very scene of the disasters.

But the long-expected blow fell in due time, and, as usual, when least anticipated.

One morning Mr. Scarse came down first to breakfast, and, as usual, eagerly scanned the papers. When his daughter entered the room she saw at once that something dreadful had happened.

"What is it, father?" she asked, and held out her hand for the *Daily Mail*.

"Nothing, my dear—nothing!" was his answer. But he kept the paper in his hand. "Only the usual disasters. Oh, this unholy war!"

"Harold—oh, father, tell me the truth—he is wounded—dead! Oh, Harold, Harold!"

"No, no," cried her father, with eagerness, "he is not wounded."

"Then he is killed!" shrieked Brenda.

"Not at all; if he were I should tell you."

She snatched the paper from his hand and spread it out; but tears blinded her, and she could not read a word. "For God's sake, tell me the worst!" was her cry. "Is my darling—is Harold ——"

"He is missing!" Mr. Scarse said roughly. "Don't look like that, Brenda. He may have been taken prisoner, and then he would be all right."

"Missing!" echoed the poor young wife. "Oh, poor Harold, pray God he is not dead!"

"Of course he's not. His name would be amongst the killed if he were. He is missing—that is all. He was taken prisoner, no doubt, at the passage of the Tugela. Hope for the best, Brenda."

"Van Zwieten," she said faintly. "I hope this is none of his work."

"Not it. If he had been in the neighborhood Wilfred would have let us know. This is only one of the ordinary chances of war. You should be thankful, my dear, that he isn't on the list of killed or wounded. The chances are that he is a prisoner, and in safety."

"I hope so! I hope so! But, father, let us go down to the War Office!"

"The War Office will know no more than is in this paper."

"I want to make certain of that. Come, father."

"My dear child, you have eaten nothing. You must have some breakfast first."

"I can't eat."

"You must. Bear yourself as an Englishwoman should, Brenda. Think how many women there are

at this moment mourning over the death of their dearest. You, at least, have hope—it might have been far worse."

Brenda, agitated as she was, could not but admit the truth of this, and she forced herself to eat. She would need all her strength to bear up against this cruel blow. After all, as her father had very rightly said, things were far from being as bad as they might have been. Her husband's name might have been on the list of those killed or dangerously wounded. As it was he was only missing. News of him might come at any time. She reproached herself with ingratitude toward a kind Providence. In a more cheerful frame of mind she finished her breakfast and got ready to go down to the War Office with her father. There she had an object-lesson in seeing the endurance of women whose news was as bad as it could be. If her own trouble was hard to bear, how infinitely harder was the lot of those whose dead lay on the stricken field.

"Father! father!" she whispered, "I should not repine. I am so much better off than these poor things!"

The news of the Tugela disaster had brought a large crowd to the War Office, and a vast number of people had collected in the street. Men and women were scanning the fatal lists, and many a heartrending sight did the girl see as she stood there waiting for her father, who had gone into the office to see if he could gain any definite news about his son-in-law. Outside, a proud old lady sat waiting in her carriage. She bore herself with dignity, but her face was ashen white. And as Brenda stood there, she saw a girl come out

and stagger into the carriage. No word was spoken, but in a storm of weeping she threw herself on the old lady's breast. And the older woman neither wept nor cried out, but drove silently away with the distracted girl beside her, and she was a woman who had given her country of the best she had to offer—the life of her son.

"Oh, poor woman! poor woman!" wept Brenda.

There was a silence as of death in that crowded office, save for now and again a low whisper or a stifled sob. And still the people came and went and came again. Brenda waited with sinking heart. When would her father come? Would he bring good news or bad? She braced herself up to bear the worst.

"It is all right, Brenda," she heard him say at last—he had come up behind her as she stood watching the crowd outside. "Harold is safe!"

"Oh, thank God for that!" she gasped, clinging to his arm. "He is not wounded, is he?"

"No! He is a prisoner. He was out with a detachment of his men on patrol duty, and the Boers captured the whole lot. I expect he will be sent to Pretoria, so you need not be anxious now, my dear."

"I don't—I don't know," she cried feverishly. "If Van Zwieten is there he won't escape so easily."

"Nonsense! Van Zwieten is not omnipotent, as you seem to think. Thank God that your husband is safe, child, and don't go out to meet your troubles."

"I do—I do. I am grateful. Oh, the poor women! The poor fatherless children! Oh, father, what a terrible thing war is!"

"It is indeed," sighed Mr. Scarse. "I remember the Crimea and all the misery it brought. That is why I was so anxious to avert this war. But we are in the midst of it now and we must go through with it. At all events, Brenda, your husband is safe. There will be no more fighting for him."

"I'm sorry for that," she said, much to his surprise. "Harold will eat his heart out now. I would rather he were fighting."

"You are not easy to please, my dear," said her father, drily. "So far as his safety is concerned, he is in the best position. You need not be afraid to look at the papers now."

"I am foolish, I know, father. But I wish he had not been taken. I don't want him to be wrapped up in cotton wool while other men are fighting."

"He would agree with you there. However, you must look upon it as the fortune of war. He will have to stay where he is till peace is proclaimed, and God knows when that will be in the present temper of this misguided nation. Come home now."

So home they went and did their best to take a cheerful view of things. It was a sad Christmas for Brenda, and for hundreds of other women who had suffered far more severely than she had done. To hear of "peace and goodwill" was like mockery in her ears. She knew that the war was a just one; that it had been forced upon England by the ambition of an obstinate old man; and that in going through with this terrible business the country was fulfilling, as ever, her appointed mission of civilization. But even so, it was terrible to open the papers and read

sad tales of grief and disaster. Hundreds of young lives—the flower of British manhood—were being sacrificed to the horrible Moloch of war; and the end was not yet in sight.

Toward the end of December the nation had been somewhat cheered by the news of General French's victory at Colesberg, but the year ended in gloom and sorrow and the wailing of Rachel for her children. And on the Continent the enemies of freedom and honest government rejoiced at the blows an enlightened Government was receiving. Truly, in those dark hours, Britannia was the Niobe of nations. But she set her teeth and fought on.

No letter had come from Wilfred about his brother's disappearance; neither did he mention it in the columns of the paper of which he was correspondent. The first news which Mrs. Burton received, other than from the War Office, was a letter which arrived one morning with the Transvaal postmark. In fear and trembling she opened it, thinking it contained an announcement from some kind soul in Pretoria that Harold was dead. To her astonishment and horror it proved to be from Van Zwieten, and was addressed to her, "care of" Mrs. St. Leger. She opened it, and was found later on by the parlor-maid in a dead faint. The first thing she did on regaining consciousness was to read it again. As she got to the end, she heard her father's step. In a tremor of excitement she ran to him.

"Oh, father, look at this!—it is from Van Zwieten —written from Pretoria."

Mr. Scarse was astonished. The Dutchman was

the last person in the world from whom he expected to hear. But the cool insolence of the man seemed to be beyond all bounds. Putting on his glasses he read the letter. Brenda sat beside him, trying to control her excitement. And this was what he read:

"DEAR MRS. BURTON,—Your husband has been taken prisoner by our burghers, and is now in Pretoria, and more or less in my charge. I write to you to say that unless you come out to me here, at once, I will have your husband shot as a spy. There is plenty of evidence to allow of this being done. I hope, therefore, that you will save his life by obeying my orders. If not, you may expect to hear of his death. You know I never speak vainly.—Yours with all love,

"WALDO VAN ZWIETEN."

"Father!" cried Brenda, when he had finished reading this cold-blooded letter, "what is to be done? My poor boy!"

"It is a trick to get you out there and into his power," said Mr. Scarse, in a tone of decision. "I don't believe he can do it—no, not for one moment."

"But I am quite sure he can. You know how vindictive he is. Oh, how can we save Harold?"

"By seeing the authorities. I will get a request sent out to Kruger; he is a God-fearing man and would not permit this atrocity."

"It will do no good," the girl said, shaking her head sadly. "No, father, I dare say if such a request were cabled to the President he would do his best; but Van Zwieten would try and kill Harold in the meantime, and if he succeeded—as he would succeed—he would say it was an accident."

"I believe he is capable of anything. But what else is to be done? You cannot obey this insolent demand!"

"I must—to save Harold!"

"Go out to Pretoria?—impossible!"

"I don't see that," she said fervently. "I can go to Delagoa Bay by some German ship—the German ships go there, don't they?—and from there I can take the train to Pretoria. It is quite simple. Then I will see Van Zwieten and trick him into letting Harold be under some one else's care for a time. Then I shall speak to the President and tell him all. I am sure he will help me, and I shall be able to take Harold away. Then Van Zwieten won't have a chance of shooting him, as he would have if a cable were sent. Leave the matter to me, father. I am a woman, and Van Zwieten is in love with me. I can blind him and trick him."

Her father looked at her in astonishment. She had evidently made up her mind to go out and get the better of the Dutchman, as she said.

"It is a mad scheme, Brenda!"

"It is the only scheme I can think of by which I can save my husband."

"But, Brenda, listen to reason. Think what a scoundrel Van Zwieten is!"

"All the more reason that I should save Harold from him."

"He might insist, as a condition of you husband's safety, that you and he be divorced. These things can be arranged, you know. And then he would marry you himself. He is capable of making the most impossible demands."

"I dare say. I know he is capable of any villainy. But you leave the matter to me, father, and I will think of some scheme by which I can get the better of him. One thing is certain—I must go at once to Pretoria."

"But, Brenda, you cannot travel alone."

"Lady Jenny will come with me. If she will not, then I shall go alone. Do you think I care for appearances when Harold is in danger of his life? I will plead with Kruger—with his wife—I am sure they will help me."

"H'm! Remember, Kruger is not omnipotent, and Van Zwieten is powerful. The President may not care to offend him. Besides, you can see for yourself, from this letter, that the man is still in love with you. Once he got you into his power he would stick at nothing that would make you a free woman."

"In that case I would die with Harold. But I don't believe the Boers are so uncivilized. Kruger will help me—I feel sure of it. You say he is a good man."

"He is," Mr. Scarse said. He was one of the few people who had fallen into this error. "Yes, if anything can be done, Kruger is the man who will do it."

"Then, dear father, will you make inquiries for me about a German ship? I want to go as soon as possible."

"Not alone, Brenda—not alone," said her father. "I will go with you. Yes, child, I will myself see the President. He knows how I have advocated his views in this country, and he will not refuse me this. We will go together."

She threw her arms round his neck. "Darling father," she murmured, "how good you are. Yes, we will go, and save my darling from that wicked man. Lady Jenny outwitted him, so I will do the same. Oh, how astonished Harold will be to see me at Pretoria!"

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE TRACK.

BRENDA BURTON was a singularly obstinate young woman. Once she had decided upon a scheme she never rested until she had carried it through. And being thus minded toward the affairs of everyday life, how much more obstinate was she likely to be touching a matter concerning the safety of her husband. Leaving Mr. Scarse to make his arrangements—and he had much to do—she herself ascertained full particulars as to the route, and the cost of the journey.

"We can make for the Canary Islands to-morrow," she told her father. "There is a Castle liner leaving in the afternoon. There we can pick up the German boat, *Kaiser Fritz*, which goes on to Delagoa Bay."

"Can't we go straight to the Cape in an English boat and get a steamer there to the bay?"

"Oh, yes, but the other way will be quicker, I think. The day after we arrive at the Canaries we can pick up the German boat, and we sha'n't have to tranship at the Cape. I don't think we can do better."

"Well, as you please," said he. "I should like to go in the *Kaiser Fritz* myself; it would afford me an excellent opportunity for learning the true opinions of the Germans about this—to my thinking—most unjust war."

Brenda shrugged her shoulders. "I dare say they will be disagreeable," she said. "They are so jealous of us, and if our country went to the wall—which she never will do," interpolated she, patriotically—"Germany would be in a very bad position. She would not be the overwhelming power she hopes to be with France and Russia at her heels. But don't let us talk politics. All I want is to make use of their boat to reach Delagoa Bay. Give me a check, father, and I will take the passages. To-morrow you must be ready to get as far as Southampton."

So, like the quick-witted woman she was, she attended to all the business, and her father found, to his astonishment, that he had nothing to do but step on board the liner. Lady Jenny Malet came to see them off. She could do nothing against Van Zwieten at present; but there was no knowing what he might do at any moment, and they must be prepared to checkmate him. So she gave Mrs. Burton a registered address, in case she might have to communicate with her, and did her best to cheer her.

"I feel sure you will find him all right, dear," she said, as she kissed the girl. "He is not the man to be shot by a scoundrel like Van Zwieten. And you can coax Kruger into doing what you want. You are pretty enough to do what you like with him."

Brenda smiled faintly—the first smile for many days. "I don't think that will have much influence with a man like Kruger," she said.

"Nonsense, my dear. He is a man, and men are always susceptible. I'm sure you have had enough experience of that," sighed Lady Jenny. "All your

troubles have arisen out of that horrid Van Zwieten being in love with you."

Brenda was not much comforted by this view of the situation. She hoped rather to move Mr. Kruger by an appeal to his religious convictions, though these were of the stern cast of the Old Testament. However, it was in a very hopeful frame of mind that she went on board the liner, and she cabled to Wilfred at Spearman's Camp telling him that she was coming out. In the hope of making things as safe as possible for her husband, she cabled also to Van Zwieten. Surely, when he received that, he would do nothing at all events, until he had seen and come to terms with her. What those terms would be she could not guess. But she imagined they would include a suggestion that she should obtain a divorce from Harold. He was, as she well knew, quite as obstinate as his respected President—and with none of his morality or his religion. In fact, Brenda was going to Pretoria without any sort of definite idea save one—that somehow or other she would save her husband from this man. That was her sole object, and achieve it she would by hook or by crook; and she had every confidence in her own capacity to outwit the Dutchman, wily as he was. And the days of calm and peace on board the boat afforded her ample time for conjecture and reflection. She had grown now to hate this man with a hatred that would only be appeased by his destruction.

They made a quick run to the islands, and the sea air did her the world of good. There were many passengers on board; but to no one of them did she

in any way confide. Sad at heart, she kept very much to herself, and either read or indulged in her own thoughts. Her father was, socially speaking, anything but popular among his fellow-passengers. Air his Little England opinions he would, with the result that the majority of the passengers, having relatives at the front, gave him a wide berth. He made not a single convert; and all those whom he tried to argue round to his own way of thinking were glad enough when he got off at Madeira.

The *Kaiser Fritz* came up to time and Brenda soon found herself on the way south. She did not much fancy the foreign boat—officers, crew and passengers being all pro-Boer to a man. They were polite enough to the English lady, but they took no trouble to disguise their real opinions. The captain expressed some surprise that she should be going to Delagoa Bay, and seemed inclined to suspect some political significance in her doing so, though it was difficult to see what grounds he could have had for such an absurd idea. And Mrs. Burton did not enlighten him, but left the matter to her father. Mr. Scarse intimated that his daughter was going to Pretoria to nurse her wounded husband, an explanation which seemed to appeal to the sentimental Germans. After that they were increasingly polite to her. But she preferred her own cabin. Her father was more companionable; but even he found but scant pleasure in their outspoken opinions on the subject of England, and her inevitable downfall, as they put it. Even he, with his Little England proclivities, felt his patriotism awake in the most alarming manner at the way these foreigners jeered and scoffed.

Smarting under the insults, he developed quite a Jingo feeling, much to his daughter's amusement; and he ended by withdrawing himself as much as possible from the society of all on board. Father and daughter were a good deal together, and both looked forward eagerly to the end of a disagreeable voyage.

One night, when they were south of the Line, they were on deck together. The heavens were bright with stars, and the great grey circle of the sea lay round them like a trackless desert. Most of those on board were down below, and the two had the deck to themselves. Brenda was disinclined for conversation. Her mind was, as usual, full of thoughts of her husband, and the only feeling she seemed cognizant of was one of joy in the thought that every day was bringing her nearer to him. Mr. Scarse broke the silence.

"Brenda," he said, "did Lady Jenny say anything about that murder?"

"Very little. She said that Van Zwieten had accused her of the crime, and that she was innocent. Of course I told her that I had never dreamed of such a thing, and never would have credited it for one moment."

"H'm! At one time I thought myself that she might be guilty," he said. "But I know now that I was wrong. That piece of crape certainly was suspicious. But poor Scarse told me that in his struggle with Malet the scarf had been torn. I never noticed it myself when I burned it. I suppose that Malet kept it in his hand without being aware of it."

"Very likely. At all events, I am sure Lady Jenny

is innocent—as innocent as my uncle. He is happy, I hope?"

"In the asylum? Yes, poor fellow, he is as happy as he can be anywhere. He has every comfort, and kind treatment. But I fear he will not live long. Van Zwieten gave him a fright by threatening to denounce him for the murder, unless he told his sad story. Some of it he did tell, but not all. I was foolish enough to relate the rest of it to Van Zwieten. But I had no alternative at the time. He was quite capable of making a scandal. Brenda, who did kill Malet? Every day the thing seems to become more obscure."

"Well, father, I can't help thinking it was Van Zwieten. Lady Jenny thinks so too."

"You don't say so? But the revolver—it was Harold's."

"Harold left them—that is, he left a case of two revolvers behind him, and both were in the library—in Mr. Malet's library on that night. Van Zwieten came to see him, and took one of them with him—at least, that is what Lady Jenny thinks."

"Brenda, that sounds improbable. Why should he kill Malet? He hardly knew him, child."

"Indeed, you are wrong there, father," she said, "he knew him only too well. Listen!" and she related the story the widow had told her concerning her husband's treachery toward his own country. Mr. Scarse was deeply indignant and indulged in language unusually strong for him. Little Englander though he was, and misguided on many points though he might be, he was an honest and an honorable man;

and he could not understand how a man in Mr. Malet's position could have so deliberately played the part of traitor. When he was in possession of all the facts, he quite agreed with Brenda that Van Zwieten was the culprit."

"Then we'll bring him to book," he said angrily. "I will force him to confess."

"That will do no good, father. The truth cannot come to light without the story of Mr. Malet's treachery being known; and Lady Jenny is more than anxious to avoid that. No, Van Zwieten must be left to the punishment of his own conscience."

"I don't think that will trouble him much," Mr. Scarse said grimly. "How I have been deceived in that man! I am sure, when I tell Kruger his true character, he will have nothing to do with him."

Brenda did not contradict this statement, although she felt pretty certain that the foxy old President was very little better himself. How her father could reconcile the opinion he held that Kruger was an honest, harmless old man with the fact that he had forced this terrible war upon England was more than she could understand. She wondered if, when her father got to Pretoria, his discovery of the true aims of the Transvaal Government would be at all modified. But of this she had her doubts. He was the most obstinate of men, and an angel from heaven could not have altered his opinion once it had been formed. Knowing this, she never argued with him. It was absolutely futile, and only caused trouble.

At the Cape the vessel stopped for a time. Brenda did not go ashore. She felt too sad and heavy at

heart to take any interest in the sight of new scenes and new people. She sat on the deck and looked at the smiling land, at the glitter of the water as it danced in the hot tropical sun. The azure of sky and sea, the transports, merchant ships, and men-of-war, the whiteness of the city set in groves of green, the whole lying under the shadow of Table Mountain, all went to form a picture unsurpassable in its peculiar beauty. It was her first sight of Africa. But it might be Harold's grave, and she hated it for its very beauty. She would have had all Nature mourn for her dear one.

Mr. Scarse went on shore and returned with the latest war news. The tactics seemed to be mostly of a defensive order. General French had driven back a Boer force which had attacked Colesberg; and the gallant Ladysmith garrison had repelled a terrible assault. The Cape Town people were in high glee over this last success, anticipating, as they did, that the Boers would now be disheartened. And no doubt it might have had this effect for a time; but the Teutonic race is not so easily beaten or discouraged. Mr. Scarse remarked on this when they left for Delagoa Bay.

"The difficulty of this war," he said, "is, that for the first time Teuton is fighting against Teuton. The very dogged courage which has enabled us to win so many battles against the Latin nations is being used against us by the Boers. We do not know when we are beaten either. But this will not be the easy task we thought, and the struggle will go on till one or other of the combatants is utterly crushed."

"Oh, England will win!" Brenda said confidently.

"I believe she will. I can't imagine England being beaten. But, as I said before, it will be no easy task. By this time they have found that out. My wonder is that they could not see that England had met a foe with courage and determination equal to her own. If she conquers, it will be one of her greatest achievements."

"She *will* conquer," his daughter repeated, and she refused to discuss the subject further. That Britain could fail never entered her head.

The *Kaiser Fritz* did not stop at Durban, somewhat to the astonishment of Mr. Scarse, as he had understood that it was customary, and on applying to the captain he received a gruff and discourteous reply. The man seemed anxious, and was always sweeping the sea with his glass. There was one other Englishman on board, and Mr. Scarse asked him if he could make out what all this anxiety and incivility meant.

"Perhaps she's got contraband goods on board. Ammunition and guns," was the reply. "These boats usually call at Durban! My own opinion is that the captain does not want to have his ship searched."

"But, my dear sir, Germany is neutral."

"I dare say," the young fellow said with a grin. "Germany is anything that suits her book. If she can smuggle in ammunition to assist the Boers you may be sure she will do it. My good sir, what with mercenaries in the Boer army, bread-stuffs, ammunition, guns and rifles being imported, we are fighting, not only the Transvaal, but the entire Continent of Europe. The Powers would give their ears to see us smashed!"

This was a somewhat new view to take of the matter, and one which did not commend itself to Mr. Scarse. He had looked upon the Boers as a handful of honest, God-fearing farmers—his favorite expression when speaking of them—struggling for their freedom against the overwhelming power of Great Britain. That they had colossal armaments, hundreds of mercenaries, and clever agents scheming for them all over the world, had never entered his head. In further conversations with this young Englishman he received considerable enlightenment, and he began to modify his views somewhat as to the absolute guilessness of Oom Paul and his gang. But he kept his opinions to himself.

The *Kaiser Fritz* did not slip past Durban as her captain had expected. When at dawn she was almost abreast of that port she was brought to by an English cruiser. There was a polite signal to "Heave to!" and the German captain, with much bad language, felt himself forced to comply with the request. The news travelled quickly through the ship, and every one came on deck, amongst the foreigners being Brenda and her father and the young Englishman. The Germans were savage, and talked a great deal about the insult to the flag of the Fatherland. Abuse of England was rife, and as she listened Brenda felt her blood boil.

Under the saffron sky of the dawn lay the menacing form of the cruiser, displaying the glorious flag of England. Across the deep blue of the sea came a large boat manned by the blue-jackets, and no sooner were they alongside than a smart officer jumped on deck with a request to see the papers of the *Kaiser Fritz*.

The captain blustered and swore in high and low Dutch; but the officer, though scrupulously polite, was quite firm. At last the papers were produced and examined, but no contraband goods appearing on the manifest, the vessel was allowed to proceed on her way, to the unbounded delight of the captain, whilst the English officer swore under his breath. The latter felt confident that there were guns and ammunition on board, and that the manifest was false. However, he had to appear satisfied, and prepared to return to his ship. But before leaving, he asked if Mr. Scarse and Mrs. Burton were on board.

"I am Mr. Scarse," said that gentleman, a good deal surprised to hear his name suddenly spoken by this stranger, "and this is Mrs. Burton. But how did you know we were here?"

"I will explain that when you are on board our boat, sir."

"But we are going on to Delagoa Bay," said Brenda.

"In search of Captain Burton?" returned the lieutenant. "In that case there is no need for you to go further. Captain Burton has escaped, and is now at Durban."

Poor Brenda nearly fainted at this joyful and unexpected news; but the eyes of the ship—envious foreign eyes—were upon her, and she struggled bravely to keep herself in hand. The officer repeated his information, and asked them to get their things together with all speed as the German was anxious to proceed. Hardly believing the joyful news that Harold was out of the power of Van Zwieten, father and daughter went below, hastily got together their belongings, and

were soon on their way to the cruiser. The Germans gave vent to an ironical "Hoch!"

"Brutes!" muttered the lieutenant. "Give way, men! Are you comfortable, Mrs. Burton?"

"Quite—thank you," she said; "but how did you know I was on board that *Kaiser Fritz?* How did Captain Burton escape? How did——"

"You will get answers to all these questions on board the *Juno,* Mrs. Burton. But I may tell you that we expected to find you and Mr. Scarse on board the *Kaiser Fritz.* Of course we came in search of contraband; but we were able to kill two birds with one stone by picking you up as well. I am very glad of it too!" and the young man, who had the true sailor's eye for beauty, looked as though he meant what he said.

The boat slipped under the grey bulk of the cruiser, and they were assisted up the side—a matter of some difficulty in mid-ocean—and were received by the captain. Then he anxiously asked for his officer's report concerning the suspected contraband. It was evidently a disappointment to him, and full steam ahead for Durban was then ordered. The boat was swung on the davits, the screw revolved, and in a few moments the *Juno* was getting along at a great rate. Then the captain took Brenda by the arm and led her down to a cabin.

"You know that your husband has escaped, Mrs. Burton?" he asked, smiling.

"Yes, but how did he get away? I feel so bewildered at all——"

"Will you walk in there, please?" was the reply. "Some one is waiting to explain."

Brenda began to tremble. Something told her what she might expect. As she entered, she saw a man in khaki, tall and slim, waiting for her with outstretched arms. She uttered a cry of joy. "Oh, Harold! Harold! my darling boy! At last! at last!"

And she fell into her husband's arms.

CHAPTER XXI.

IN SOUTH AFRICA.

It was indeed Harold—thinner, perhaps, than when he had left England, but bronzed and hardened, and fit in every way for the arduous work of the campaign. Brenda clung to him as though she would never let him go. She looked upon him as one who had been snatched from the jaws of death; and assuredly he would have found a grave in Pretoria had he been left to the tender mercies of Van Zwieten. He, on his side, was delighted and moved beyond words at her tenderness, and at her pluck in undertaking a toilsome and dangerous journey to be near him. It was some time before husband and wife recovered themselves sufficiently to exchange confidences. Brenda cried in spite of her brave spirit, for the joy of this unexpected meeting had shaken her nerves. When she had regained her composure, and was able to speak, it was to congratulate her husband on his escape from Pretoria, and from the dangerous custody of Van Zwieten. He laughed outright.

"That is just where you make the mistake, my love!" he said. "I never was in or near Pretoria, and I have seen nothing of Van Zwieten since I left England. What on earth makes you think so?"

She sat down and looked at him in astonishment. "I don't understand you," she said. "You were re-

ported missing. I went to the War Office myself and made certain that the report was correct."

"That is true enough. I was out on patrol duty with a small force while the General was trying to force the passage of the Tugela. A party of Boers took us by surprise and captured us; but after a week in their custody I was lucky enough to escape. I'll tell you all about it later. What I want to know now is how you come to be out in these parts."

"Don't you know? Van Zwieten wrote to me saying that you were at Pretoria and under his charge, and that he would have you shot if I did not come out to see him. Father and I set off at once, and we were on our way to Pretoria to see the President and implore him to save you from that man."

"Brenda, are you sure of what you are saying? It is all new to me."

"Here is his letter. I always carry it with me. I was going to show it to Kruger when I saw him."

Harold took the letter, which his wife produced from her pocketbook, and read it with a frown. "Well, he *is* a scoundrel!" he remarked as he gave it back to her. "Of course, it is a trap, and a very clever one. I suppose he heard that I was missing, through the Boer spies, and he turned the information to his own advantage. Don't you see, Brenda, he wanted you to come out to the Transvaal so that you might be in his power."

"The beast!" cried she, crimson at having been so tricked. "I assure you, Harold, I believed the letter was written in all good faith. The War Office said you were missing, and I thought you would be trans-

ferred with the other prisoners to Pretoria. That Van Zwieten should be there, and that you should be in his power, did not surprise me in the least. I never dreamed for a moment that it was a trick. Oh, how lucky it was that you were able to stop me! How did you know I was on board the *Kaiser Fritz?*"

"Easily enough. You cabled to Wilfred telling him so. He was at Spearman's Camp at the time, and so was I. When he showed it to me I could not understand at first how it was that you were going to Pretoria; but it struck me that, as I was reported missing, you might think that I had been transferred to the Transvaal capital. I made up my mind that I would stop you at Cape Town. My first idea was to wire to meet you there; but the General wanted some one to send down to Durban about some business, and I contrived to have myself selected for the task. There I heard that the *Kaiser Fritz* was suspected of having contraband on board, and that she would be stopped by the *Juno*. I knew the captain, and I told him all about you and your journey out here. He was good enough to have me on board; and so it all came about. Oh, my dear wife!" he cried, clasping her in his arms, "how thankful I am that you are safe. If I had heard that you were at Pretoria, and in the power of that villain, it would have driven me silly."

"He is a bitter enemy," she said. "I should have killed him if he had done you any harm."

"I was never in any danger of my life, dearest—at least, not from him."

"No; I see it now." She paused, and then went on. "After all, I can find it in my heart to forgive him, even for this trick, since it has brought me to you. I won't go home again until you do."

"But, my darling, I must go to the front. I leave Durban to-morrow. You can't come with me."

"Yes, I can—and I will," she insisted. "Oh, I know what you would say, that it is not a woman's place; but it is a woman's place, and her duty, to nurse the wounded, and that is what I shall do. I know a good deal about nursing, and I'm sure the doctors will let me help; they can't refuse."

"But think of the terrible hardships!"

"It is far more hardship for me to have to sit at home when you are in danger. At least, I shall be near you; and perhaps, if Van Zwieten does any more of his plotting, I may be able to frustrate him. It is no use your looking at me like that, Harold; I won't leave you again. You are all I have in the world. If you were to die I should die also."

"There is your father."

"Yes, father is very dear to me, now that we understand one another, but he is not you. Oh, my love, my love, don't send me away again! It will break my heart to leave you!" She paused, then added, defiantly, "I won't go, there!"

He laughed, and he tried to persuade her to stay at Durban or Pietermaritzburg, where she would be in comfort and safety; but he might have saved his breath. To the front she would go, and nothing would move her. In the end—as might have been expected—she got her own way, and her husband

promised that she should go with him up the Tugela, if he could procure passports for her and her father. He admired her spirit more than a little, and he was only too glad to have her with him; but it was against his better judgment that he consented. However, there was this to be said—she would be in no greater danger from the intrigues of Van Zwieten at the front than she would be at Durban. After all, it might be as well, with such an enemy, that she should be beside her husband.

"Then that's all right," she said, taking this hardly-earned consent quite as a matter of course. "And now tell me how you managed to escape from the Boers?"

"Well, it came about in this way. As you may guess, when we found ourselves surrounded we made a hard fight for it. We killed a few of the enemy. A boy of seventeen rushed at me; he fired, but missed, and I had him at my mercy. I raised my revolver, but I could not bring myself to shoot so young a lad. When he was about to fire again—for I was turning away—I managed to knock him down. Then we were overpowered and had to lay down our arms. The lad I had spared proved to be the son of the Boer leader, a fine old fellow called Piet Bok. He was so pleased with me that he offered to let me go free; but I could not leave my men. Then, when we were about to be sent on to Pretoria, he renewed his offer. I had by this time been separated from my men, so I accepted. He had kept me all the time under his own charge, and had treated me very well. So one night he led me out of their camp, gave me a horse and gun, and sent me on my way."

"God bless him!" cried Brenda, fervently.

"I was in the Tugela district," he continued, "somewhere in the neighborhood of a place called Spion Kop, which has been very strongly fortified by the Boers. The country was swarming with the enemy, and it was difficult enough to find my way back to camp; then my map—thanks to our Intelligence Department—was all wrong. By day I hid in gullies and behind kopjes, and kept my eyes open. I managed to fetch the river, but I could not get over at first. Then one night I determined to make the best of a bad job, so I made my horse swim for it. The current was strong, and it was pretty hard work to keep on at all; but at last I was forced to let go, and I was swept by the current on to the further side. I kept myself hidden all through that day, and got on when night came. I reached our camp about dawn, and was very nearly shot by a sentry. However, I made myself known, and got in safely. I was dead beat too."

"My poor Harold, how you have suffered!"

"Nonsense. Don't make a fuss over a little thing like that. You must be a true soldier's wife and laugh at these things. But now that I have told you everything, and we have settled what is to be done, I must see your father."

They found Mr. Scarse on deck with the captain. He received Harold with unaffected pleasure.

"I am thankful to see you alive," he said. "The captain has been telling me all about your miraculous escape."

"I am glad to be able to strike another blow for Old England, sir; but I have to thank you for your kindness

in coming out. You were going into the very jaws of the lion to find me!"

"To Pretoria—yes," he said simply. "But I am glad there is no need to do that. And yet I should have enjoyed meeting Kruger."

"You shall see him when we take the capital," Harold said. "Brenda has made up her mind to stay until the end of the war."

"Brenda?—what nonsense!"

"Oh, I must, father—if only to protect Harold from Van Zwieten."

"Ah! Van Zwieten! What about that letter, Harold?"

"A trap, Mr. Scarse; a trap to catch Brenda!"

"Why, the man's a villain!"

"He is all that. I hope to get a shot at him some day; I have a long score to settle with the brute!"

"I agree with you. I hope you will," Mr. Scarse said emphatically. "Punish the scoundrel! Do you know that it was he who murdered Malet?"

"No, really?—I suspected as much; but he accused me, you know, at Chippingholt. That was why I went away so suddenly. I could not face Brenda with that hanging over me."

"You should have trusted me, Harold," she said somewhat reproachfully; "I never would have believed you guilty."

"I was wrong, I know dear, but for the moment I lost my head. You see he had got my revolver, and with that apparently the murder was committed."

"It was, and by Van Zwieten himself. You left the revolver at the Manor."

"I did, the last time I stayed there. I left two in a case."

"The case was in the library, and he must have taken one of them out."

"Why—in Heaven's name?"

"Ah, that is a long and painful story," Mr. Scarse said significantly. "You tell it, Brenda."

And so Brenda related the story of Malet's treachery, and the reasons which had led Lady Jenny to conceal the dead man's shame.

Harold could hardly contain his indignation when he heard that an Englishman had acted so base a part. To be bought and sold by a scoundrelly Dutchman; to be the creature of a foreign power; and all the while to be acting the *rôle* of Judas toward the land which had borne him—these things were almost beyond the soldier's comprehension.

"I'd have shot him with my own hand," he cried, striding to and fro, "the low blackguard! The most honest action Van Zwieten ever did in his life was to kill the wretch."

"Don't talk so loud, Harold!" said his wife; "we must keep this to ourselves for Lady Jenny's sake."

"Yes, you are right, Brenda; and I will make quite sure of the silence of Van Zwieten by shooting him at sight. I am certain to come across him, and when I do I'll finish him; not because he murdered Malet, but because he tempted him to be a traitor!"

When at last his indignation had cooled down somewhat, Harold introduced his wife to the captain and the other officers. Without revealing too much, he related how, hearing he had been taken prisoner, and

that he was at Pretoria, she had started out in search of him, when she had been intercepted by the *Juno*. And she received so many compliments on her pluck that she blushed as she had never before blushed in her life. Her beauty was greatly admired by the susceptible tars; and Harold was considered a lucky fellow to have so charming and clever and brave a wife. Mr. Scarse, after all he had recently heard of the Boers, was not inclined to champion them quite so openly, and therefore he got on well enough. On the whole, the short voyage was most enjoyable, and recompensed Brenda for all that she had suffered on board the *Kaiser Fritz*. Indeed, it was with great regret that she left the *Juno* at Durban. And she vowed ever after that sailors were the finest and most delightful of men. Harold reminded her laughingly that she belonged to the junior branch of the Service. When they were leaving, the captain gave Captain Burton a parting word of warning.

"See here!" he said, with a broad smile, "don't you lose any more of our guns or I'm blest if we won't take up the war ourselves," whereat Harold laughed, though in truth the shaft went home.

He parted excellent friends with his hosts, and as for Brenda, the officers gave her three hearty cheers as she stepped off the *Juno* at Durban; and the blue-jackets grinned and thoroughly endorsed their officers' good taste.

They found out the best hotel in the place, and took up their quarters there for the short time they had to spend in Durban before leaving for the front. Harold went off to see if he could get a permit for his wife and her father to accompany him. Meanwhile, they

wandered about the town together. This was Brenda's first experience of Africa, and she enjoyed it. It was as though she had dropped on to a new planet. The wide streets, with the verandas before the shops, the troops, the throng of Kaffirs, and the brilliant color of the whole scene amused and delighted her beyond words. The air was full of rumors of what was doing at the front. False reports and true came in frequently, so there was no lack of excitement. Even Mr. Scarse caught the fever and was not half so eager in his denunciation of the Government as he had been. Moreover, he was beginning to find out that the Boers were not the simple, harmless creatures Dr. Leyds in Europe was representing them to be. In the smoking-room of the hotel he heard stories about them which made what remaining hairs he had stand upright with horror. On mature consideration it seemed to him that if the Government handed back South Africa to the Boers, as the Little England party wished, the clock of time would be put back a hundred years, and the black races would be exterminated. In his dismay at this idea, Mr. Scarse could not help revealing something of what he was feeling to his daughter. She was delighted at his return to what she called a sane state of mind, and she openly expressed her pleasure.

"I wish you could bring out a dozen men or so, father—men of your party, I mean. It might teach them that England is not so invariably in the wrong as they seem to think."

"My dear," he confessed with some show of penitence, "I fear our race is too insular; we have many things to learn."

"We have not to learn how to colonize or how to fight, father," she said, with true imperial spirit. "It is my belief that Providence gave us those gifts that we might civilize the world. If our Empire were to dwindle to nought it would be a bad day for the world."

"Yes, my dear, it would. After all, we are the only nation that thinks twice before we do anything."

In short, Mr. Scarse was rapidly turning his back upon the old narrow views to which he had so long clung, and with a boardening mind the true meaning of the Imperialistic policy was becoming apparent. Discarding the parish politics of Clapham, he took to looking around him well; and in doing so he found much to occupy his thoughts. Old and crusted ideas cannot easily be dislodged, and—to use Oliver Wendell Holmes's image—Mr. Scarse had been polarized for years.

Harold succeeded in getting the permit for his wife and father-in-law to go to the front, and it was arranged that they should start the next day. In the morning Captain Burton went about his military business—for he had to carry a report concerning some stores back to his general—and Mr. Scarse being occupied in a political discussion with a South African whom he had met at the hotel, Brenda thought she would take a stroll. She bought a few things she wanted, explored the principal streets, and—as she had ample time—turned her attention to the suburbs. It was very hot, and she walked slowly under the blaze of the African sun. The red dust rose in clouds; there

was a drowsy hum of insects all around, and patient oxen toiled along the dusty roads. There were plenty of Colonials about, and a good deal of attention was attracted to Mrs. Burton both on account of her great beauty and her dress. Now and again a body of soldiers in khaki would march through the streets followed by a crowd of people. The Kaffirs lined up under the verandas, and grinned from ear to ear as the "rooibaatjes" went by, although they missed the red coats which had procured them that name from the Boers. From what she could gather Brenda learned that these Kaffirs were all in favor of the English cause, for they both hated and dreaded the Boers. And small wonder, considering how they were terrorized by the inhuman sjambok.

At length, getting tired of novelty, Brenda turned her steps back to the hotel. It was drawing near midday, and she wanted something to eat before they left. As she took a turning up a side street which led into the principal thoroughfare, she saw a man standing under a veranda—a tall, bulky man with golden hair and golden beard, and he was coolly watching her.

A shiver passed through her as she caught sight of him. For it was her enemy, Van Zwieten.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT THE FRONT.

VAN ZWIETEN'S sins had evidently made no difference in his fortunes. He appeared to be flourishing like the proverbial green bay tree. He was dressed in a smart riding suit, with long brown boots, and a smasher hat of the approved Boer type. Quite unabashed at sight of Brenda, he crossed the road with an impudent smile and held out his hand. She shot one glance of indignation at him, and drew aside as though to avoid contact with an unclean thing—a proceeding which appeared to cause the man some shame, although he tried to assume an air of unconcern and amusement.

"You won't shake hands with me, Mrs. Burton?" he said, quite jauntily.

"How dare you speak to me?" she said, drawing back. "I wonder you are not ashamed to look me in the face after that trick about the letter."

"Ah! that was what the Boers call 'slim,'" he said, wincing, nevertheless, at her open contempt for him. "All's fair in love and war, you know, but your husband has been rather in advance of himself on this occasion, and the plot has failed. Yes, you see I admit that it is a plot, and I admit that it has failed."

"I have nothing to say to you," said Brenda, coldly,

"except to tell you that if you attempt to molest either my husband or myself further I shall have you arrested as a spy."

He looked uneasily down the road and at the stern, set faces of the passing soldiers. He knew that from such men as they he might expect precious little mercy once the word spy had gone out against him, followed by damning evidence of his complicity. Boer treachery had to be avenged; there had been plenty of it about, and he did not fancy being a scapegoat for others.

"My dear Mrs. Burton," he went on calmly, "I wonder you spare me at all. Why not have me arrested now and have done with it? I am completely in your power, am I not? You have but to raise your voice and the thing would be done. Indeed, I am not at all sure that I should reach the jail alive. They hate spies here, and it is true they have good reason to. You may not have such a chance again, so cry out upon me now and revenge yourself on me once and for all for my crime—my crime of loving you."

"No, I will not," replied Brenda, firmly; "but I give you fair warning, Mr. van Zwieten, that if you do not leave this place immediately I shall at once inform the authorities about you. In luring me to Pretoria you made one mistake; you thought I should come unprepared. I did no such thing. I have ample evidence with me to prove that in London your occupation was that of a spy. Lady Jenny gave me the papers."

"I'm very much obliged to Lady Jenny, I'm sure," he

said, with a bow. "At Pretoria—for Oom Paul—you could hardly have brought credentials calculated to speak more highly in my favor. He would be quick to appreciate my services."

"Why did you wish me to come to Pretoria? You know I am married."

"Yes, I know you are married; but marriage can be severed as all else is severed—by death," he said significantly. "If you had come to Pretoria—but there is no need to talk about that," he broke off impatiently. "I was duly informed that your husband was missing, but he escaped before I could reach the Tugela and myself take him to Pretoria, where he would have been completely in my power. I wrote the letter thinking you would really find him there. But he escaped and got your telegram—the one you sent to Wilfred Burton. I followed him down here, and learned how he intended to intercept the *Kaiser Fritz*. You see I am well informed, Mrs. Burton."

Brenda was astonished at the extent of the man's knowledge and the dogged fierceness with which he seemed to follow her and Harold. She wondered if it would not be wise to have so dangerous an enemy arrested at once. But the thought of Lady Jenny and the shame which it would bring upon her through the deeds of her late husband—which Van Zwieten would assuredly reveal in such a contingency—prevented her from deciding upon so severe a course. Later on she had reason bitterly to regret that she had not acted upon her first impulse. Had she done so it would have saved both her husband and herself

endless trouble. Van Zwieten half guessed what was in her mind, but he made no move, and seemed quite content to abide by her decision. There was even a smile on his face as he looked at her. Villain as he was, his courage was undeniable. The pity was that such a virtue should not have been linked to others. But then that was the man all over. He was a belated Conrad the Corsair. "A man of one virtue and ten thousand crimes." Yet another virtue might be added. He loved Brenda, and he loved her honestly.

"I see you know your business as a spy, Mr. van Zwieten," she said coldly. "But all your work is thrown away. If you succeeded in killing my husband, as you seem anxious to do, I should kill myself!"

Van Zwieten turned a shade paler. For once he was moved out of his attitude of sneering insolence. "No, no," he said hoarsely, "do not think of such a thing! I won't harm your husband, on my honor——"

"Your honor! The honor of a spy?"

"The honor of a man who loves you!" he said with some dignity.

She shrugged her shoulders. She had not much belief in a love which was so selfish in its aims and so unscrupulous in the carrying out of them. But she would not argue further with him, she thought. The conversation was taking a turn of a personal character highly repugnant to her, and she moved away. "Well, Mr. van Zwieten, I have warned you! If you don't leave British territory I shall inform the authorities of your London career. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye," he said. He took off his hat with a grand bow as she left him. Nor did he make any attempt to stay her; he knew already that she was going to the front with her husband, and he had every intention of following. That she would reveal his true character he did not for one moment believe. There he had her in his power, for he would at once make known Gilbert Malet's conduct, and that would mean shame and trouble for Lady Jenny, from which Brenda was more than anxious to shield her, as he well knew. She had been a good friend to the girl, and had indirectly done a great deal to bring about the marriage. This Dutchman had more knowledge of a woman's nature than most of his sex, and he found it of no little service in the profession which he had taken up.

Brenda found her husband impatiently awaiting her. He had made all arrangements for the journey; and after a hasty meal they went down to the station. She was in high spirits. With Harold beside her, and the prospect of a novel and busy life in her capacity of nurse, she was perfectly happy. And he, still more of a lover than a husband, thought he had never seen her look more beautiful.

Concerning the journey there is very little to say. There was considerable monotony about it. Some of the scenery was beautiful, particularly when they got amongst the mountains, but for the most part the plains extended on all sides, grey and dreary, the kopjes humping themselves everywhere amongst the karoo bushes. The dust-storms, too, were altogether disagreeable, and in spite of her veil and cloak Brenda

arrived at the camp in a very gritty condition, and thoroughly worn out. Her husband saw the doctor at once and told him of his wife's desire to nurse the wounded. Her offer was gratefully accepted, for Brenda had had a certain amount of professional experience which stood her in good stead now. So next day she took up her quarters in the hospital and went to work in earnest. Mr. Scarse, having been introduced to the authorities, amused himself by wandering about the camp and enjoying the novelty of his surroundings. To a home-staying man such as he, the round of daily life at the front proved most amusing.

Indeed, father and daughter were equally delighted with this new experience. Mrs. Burton proved herself a most capable nurse, and paid every attention to those under her charge. Her husband chafed somewhat at first. He did not like the idea of his wife doing such work; but when he saw that she really enjoyed it, and that she was anxious to be of use in her own way to those who were fighting for Queen and country, he made no further opposition. Moreover, he had his own duties to attend to, and upon the whole, husband and wife saw very little of each other. The few moments they did have were therefore all the sweeter. And the knowledge that Brenda was near him and safe from the machinations of Van Zwieten was a supreme satisfaction to Harold. He had yet to learn that the Dutchman was as active as ever, and bent upon getting her into his power.

Since his failure to cross the Tugela, General Buller had been reconstructing his plans, and was taking

ample time over the preparations. As he himself said, there should be no turning back this time. The garrison at Ladysmith was holding out bravely; but the messages showed that they were anxiously expecting relief. The soldiers, held like hounds in a leash, were longing to get at the foe and wipe out their first failure. But the days passed and no move was made. On this side of the Tugela all was safe; but on the other the Boers swarmed, although they kept at a safe distance from the British position. To Brenda, the mere fact of living in a camp in time of war was sufficiently exciting.

Shortly after their arrival, Captain Burton was ordered on patrol duty to scour the neighboring country on this side of the Tugela. He said good-bye to his wife and went off in high spirits. But it was with a sinking heart that she watched him go off on this dangerous duty. The arrival of Wilfred, however, served to cheer her somewhat.

As has been stated, young Burton was acting as war correspondent for one of the London papers, and had been gathering information about the country around. He had been absent, therefore, when his brother's party arrived; but when he came back the first thing he did was to look up Brenda at the hospital. She was struck at once by his healthy appearance. He seemed less nervous and hysterical than he had been in London, for the outdoor life and the vigorous exercise was telling upon him. But his big black eyes flashed as feverishly as ever; nor did they lose their restlessness when Brenda told him of her meeting with Mr. van Zwieten at Durban. To Harold she had never

mentioned it, knowing too well his impulsive nature; but with his brother she felt it was different. He already knew so much about the man that a little information more or less did not matter. But he was inclined to blame her for having shown the spy any mercy at all.

"What could I do?" expostulated Brenda in dismay. "You know that if I had had him arrested he would have revenged himself by telling all he knew of Mr. Malet's life, and then think how terrible it would have been for Lady Jenny!"

"She must take her chance," he said gloomily. "She must be prepared to suffer all for her country. Van Zwieten will pick up all sorts of knowledge at Durban, and he may be able then to hamper our plans!"

"I don't think he will stay there, Wilfred. I told him that if he did not leave I would give information to the authorities. He daren't face that! And I don't think he will be very long in following us here!" she added with a flush of anger. "He will follow us everywhere. I should not be surprised if he were across the river now in the hope of taking me prisoner when the camp is moved."

"Directly the advance begins, Brenda, you must get back to Durban. It will never do for you to remain here. There's going to be some pretty hard fighting."

"Yes; but not here. I shall be perfectly safe behind the British lines."

"Perhaps; I hope so." Wilfred looked gloomy and bit his nails abstractedly, a habit with him when he was annoyed. "I tell you what it is, Brenda," he

burst out. "I'm very doubtful about the wisdom of this advance. Buller's idea is, I believe, to cross the Tugela and try and pierce the Boer centre. I'm afraid he won't succeed."

"Oh, Wilfred! Have you no more faith in the British soldiers than that?"

"I have every faith in the rank and file—yes, and in many of the junior officers, but I confess candidly that I don't feel altogether the same amount of trust in our leaders. The mere fact of this advance having been decided upon goes to prove to me that they don't know their business! The country between this and Ladysmith is precipitous—I know nothing like it outside Switzerland or the Rockies—and it seems to me to be a mad thing to lead an army over it with heavy transport and all that unless that army is in overwhelming superiority to the opposing force—which we know it isn't. The whole place is strongly fortified, and the positions that will have to be stormed are almost impregnable. These Boers know only too well what they are about. They have chosen their ground well. Mark my words, there will be great loss of life if not a great disaster. It is throwing away lives to attempt campaigning in this district."

"But Ladysmith must be relieved!"

"I know; but it will never be relieved in this way. Even the valor of the British soldier is powerless against the hail of bullets which will rain down on him from these natural fortresses, and ten to one he won't see a single Boer to shoot at in return. They are devilish clever at keeping out of sight; of course, I am only a civilian and don't intend to set my opinion

against that of the professional soldier; but there is such a thing as common sense, and we have not had enough of it about in the conduct of this campaign."

Brenda was impressed in spite of herself. "What do you think ought to be done, Wilfred?"

"Fall back on Durban and reconstruct the plan of campaign. Buller's original idea of invading the Free State was by far the best. If we took the capital we should cut the rabbits off from their burrows, and ten to one the Free Staters would be disheartened. Then again, in that country we should have had more open fighting, and manœuvring would have been child's play to what it is here. It is sheer madness hurling line after line against these impregnable fortresses. Even if they are taken it can only be at terrible loss. Believe me, Buller's original plan was the best—the only one. But I hear he was overruled. But you can take my word for it—if Buller makes this move there will be a terrible disaster."

Brenda seemed disturbed at this view of things. She could not believe that a soldier of General Buller's experience could be capable of so grave an error of judgment. And yet, as Wilfred put it, this advance did seem to be of an unduly hazardous nature. But there again, Wilfred was always so pessimistic. He was not the man to look at anything hopefully when he could do the opposite. The men themselves were all full of confidence, she knew, and were looking forward to relieving their gallant comrades in Ladysmith within a very short time now. Wilfred must be wrong, she argued; it was more than likely that the General had some information up his sleeve that no

one knew anything about. At all events, she was not going to look on the black side of things. Thus she comforted herself somewhat.

Harold returned from his patrolling, but only for a short while. Again and again he was sent out, sometimes into the enemy's country, and he was in the saddle from morning till night. Brenda saw but little of him, and had to put up with his continued absence as best she could. She had, as it happened, plenty of work to distract her. She was an excellent nurse, and did good service in the hospital, not sparing herself in any way. Indeed, so constantly was she employed, that the doctor insisted upon her taking a sufficient amount of exercise, and strongly advised her to ride. This commended itself to her, for she rode well and was never happier than when in the saddle. She managed to obtain a habit from a colonial lady who was also in the camp. Her husband managed to procure for her a capital little animal—one of those active little ponies used by the Boers. And so she came to make frequent excursions into the surrounding country.

"You must keep on this side of the river, Mrs. Burton," said the doctor. "As long as you do that you are quite safe, even beyond the camp lines. But don't cross the Tugela. Directly you do that you run risks. I can't afford to lose my best nurse, you know."

Brenda looked at the sullen waters of the stream rolling through the melancholy veldt, and laughed. "I should be a clever woman to cross that river, doctor, even if I wanted to. You may depend upon my taking every care of myself. I shall keep on the

right side from sheer inability to get on the wrong one."

But it was not often that Brenda was allowed to ride alone. She was not the sort of woman to have to seek a cavalier. But as the time drew near when the General intended to make his move, his juniors found they had very little leisure, and she had perforce to ride alone. But even so she had no fear, though her father worried a good deal about her. But as she always returned safely, even he grew gradually accustomed to see her go off unattended.

Every now and again there came upon her a feeling that she was being watched. She would look round and see a Kaffir staring fixedly at her. This happened on several days in succession. Yet she could not be sure that it was always the same man. The natives were all so very much alike to her that it was impossible to distinguish one from another. However, this espionage was in nowise aggressive; on the contrary, if espionage it were, it was done very skillfully. It might be even pure fancy on her part, for ever since that meeting with Van Zwieten in Durban her nerve was anything but steady. At all events, she decided not to say anything to her husband about it lest he should forbid her excursions altogether, and now that she had taken to riding again she was very loth to give it up.

She wondered if it might be possible that Van Zwieten was about. It was possible—just possible, but she thought not probable. He would know that Wilfred was in the camp, and that he would have no hesitation in denouncing him as a spy; and for that

reason she did not think he would be so foolish as to trust himself within the British lines. At least so long as she kept on this side the Tugela he could not molest her. He was no fool to risk his life in a mad attempt which would mean certain failure. So she comforted herself. But the feeling of being watched still remained with her.

At last the order to advance was given, and the men, tired of inaction, joyfully obeyed. Harold had been absent two days on scout duty; this time across the river which Warren's brigade were preparing to negotiate. He had been sent out with a small force to make a reconnaissance in the enemy's country. She was beginning to feel rather anxious for his return. Despondent and full of vague foreboding as she was, she fancied that a ride would do her good, and she set out as usual, somewhere about sundown. She intended to go only a short way and return before it grew dark. The Kaffir who saddled her horse watched her ride out of the camp and grinned evilly.

Behind the rugged mountains the sky was a fiery red, and was barred with black clouds. The air was hot and sultry, and there was promise of a storm in those heavy masses lying in the east. Under the crimson glare the veldt looked grim and ominous. The kopjes stood up like huge gravestones; and where the grass failed, the sandy karoo, even more barren, took its place. Here and there were farmhouses with red walls and corrugated outbuildings, and the dull red light bathed the lonesome scene as if in blood. The oppressive feeling in the air recalled to Brenda's mind that memorable night at Chippingholt

when Malet had been done to death. Just such another storm was impending. She began to feel nervous as the recollection came upon her and she decided to return.

For some time her pony had been restive, tossing his head and champing his bit. He was usually so quiet that she could not understand it, but just then, as she had made up her mind to return, he grew even more distressed and finally he bolted. She let him have his head and in nowise lost hers. She would be able to pull him up after a few miles. On he galloped, the bit between his teeth, raising the loose red sand, and taking her further and further away from the camp; past kopjes, past Kaffir huts, stone walls, sheep kraals, he tore. She made several attempts to check him, but in vain. Suddenly he put his foot into a hole, stumbled, and sent her flying over his head. She lay on the ground half stunned. The pony, relieved of his burden, scampered off. She was able to realize that she was there alone—on the karoo, far from the camp, and with night just upon her

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DUTCH LOCHINVAR.

DUSTY and draggled from her fall, and with a swimming head, Brenda sat on an ant-hill, wondering how she could extricate herself from so unpleasant a position. The pony was far away, lost in the shadows of the karoo, and she was miles and miles from camp. It might be that the animal would find its own way home, and that they would send out in search of her, but busy as they were with the hurry and bustle of the advance, it was very possible that her absence would not be noticed. Had her husband been there—but she knew that he was far away in the enemy's country taking stock of the Boer movements and waiting for the division to come up. Wilfred was but a scatter-brain. She could not trust him. On the whole, she thought it was most unlikely that any one would trouble about her, or, in the confusion, even miss her. She was lost in the veldt.

Fortunately she had plenty of courage; and when her brain had steadied from the shock she began to look about her. One thing was certain, she would not, and could not, remain in the veldt all night. If it was fine perhaps there would be no great hardship in that, in spite of the cold, but a heavy storm was coming on, and she would be drenched to the skin. The red sun sank down behind the hills; dark

clouds labored up from the east; and the wide plain around her was swallowed up in the gloom. The place and the time were eerie; and the girl felt a superstitious thrill as she rose painfully to her feet, trying hard to collect her thoughts. At first it was the cause of the disaster which puzzled her.

Why had the pony run away? She had ridden him frequently, and there was not an ounce of vice in the little beast. That he should suddenly bolt without rhyme or reason was quite incomprehensible. Perhaps, had she looked back and seen the evil grin on the face of the Kaffir who had saddled him, she would not have been at such a loss to explain the little pony's freak.

But something she must do. She would walk on till she came to a Boer farmhouse, and get them to take her in for the night. Then she would get a horse and return to the camp in the morning. Perhaps she might even chance on some English people, seeing that she was in an English colony and one loyal to the Queen. That there were rebels there it was true, but not on that side of the river. Having a wholesome dread of their foes at close quarters, they would not dare to cross. So far, then, she felt safe; what she needed was food and shelter. Kilting up her riding skirt she went forth in the fast-gathering darkness in search of them.

It was weary work plodding over the loose sand, and after the first quarter of a mile she was quite worn out. It seemed as though she would have to pass the night on the open veldt. Then it occurred to her that if she shouted some one might hear and

come to her rescue. And if by chance she did fall into the hands of the enemy they would surely treat her kindly. Whatever his faults, the Boer was too religious to be wholly a scoundrel. Assistance she must have, so straightway she hollowed her hands and shouted through them. Her long, shrill cry pierced the air time after time, but there was no response. The echo died away and the quiet shut down again, and she heard the desert talking to itself—the faint murmur of the wind rustling over the sand, the gurgle of the river, and at times the wail of a solitary bird. Again and again she shouted with a courage born of despair. All was silent, silent as the grave. Then a sound fell upon her ears. It came nearer and nearer until it took shape and defined itself as the steady gallop of a horse.

For a moment she was afraid; but luckily she had with her a small but serviceable revolver which Harold made her carry. She drew it from her belt. She was prepared to use it if necessary against an enemy; even against herself. But perhaps it was some well-meaning and kindly Boer, or, better still, an Englishman. She resolved to risk attracting his attention. Anything was better than a night alone on that desolate waste. Taking her courage in both hands, she cried again, and the galloping of the horse was now close upon her. Then a man's voice shouted. She replied and ran forward to meet her preserver, as she prayed he might prove to be. Already she thanked God for her deliverance. She came up close with him, and peered anxiously through the lowering light to take in his features. Instantly she recognized them. Her

blood seemed to freeze in her veins as she did so. Those features she knew only too well; there was no mistaking that stalwart figure. That it should be he of all men!—Waldo van Zwieten!

"What! Mrs. Burton?" he said politely, as he swung himself off his big black steed. "Well, I am surprised. This is indeed an unexpected pleasure." Brenda shrank back and fumbled for her revolver. Brave as she was, the man's mocking suavity terrified her. She said not a word, but looked at him as he stood, strong and tall and masterful, beside his horse.

"Can you not speak?" he said impatiently. "How comes it that I find you here?"

"My horse ran away with me and threw me," said Brenda, keeping at a safe distance from the preserver Fate had so ironically sent her. "Will you please to conduct me back to the camp, Mr. van Zwieten?"

"What! and run the chance of arrest? No, thank you. But there is a Boer farmhouse a couple of miles away, near the river. I can take you there if you like."

"Can I trust you?" asked Brenda, in a tremulous voice.

"You can trust the man who loves you."

"If you talk to me like that I won't go with you."

"Then I am afraid you will have to pass the night on the veldt."

"Mr. van Zwieten," she said with dignity, "an accident has placed me in your company, but not in your power. I have a revolver, and if you attempt to insult me I shall——"

"Kill me, I suppose."

"No, but I will kill myself!"

His face twitched. He knew she would do what she said, and his love for her was so great that he would prevent that, even at the cost of his own life. "You need have no fear, Mrs. Burton," he said in a low tone; "I will treat you with all respect. Get on my horse and we will make for the farmhouse I speak of."

Unpleasant as it was, there seemed nothing for it but to accept his offer. The position could not be worse, and it might be made better. So far, she thought, she had the upper hand; but she was puzzled by his politeness, and mistrusted it. However, she had no time to analyze her sensations, for the darkness was coming on apace, and the sooner she reached human habitation the better.

"I will go with you," she said bravely; "I will accept your offer. I do not think you are a good man, and I have used hards words to you, I know; still, I will trust you now."

Van Zwieten bowed. He said no word, but held the stirrup for her to mount. With his assistance she swung herself into the saddle, and being a good horsewoman, she settled herself comfortably on it without much difficulty.

In silence he began to lead the horse across the veldt. All the while she kept a tight grasp on her little revolver and a sharp eye on his every action. For some time they proceeded thus without a word. Then Van Zwieten laughed in a low, musical way. "What a fool I am!" he said slowly. "I love you

madly; I have you in my power, and yet I do not take so much as a kiss. I am a coward!"

Her face burned in the darkness, but she gave no sign of fear.

"You call yourself a coward," she said calmly. "I call you a brave man."

"Oh, I am a spy!" he cried scornfully.

"You are a spy and, for all I know, a murderer; but you are a brave man, Mr. van Zwieten, all the same, for you can rule yourself. I never thought of you as I do at this moment."

"You say that because you wish to conciliate me," he retorted angrily, "not because you think so. I am not a good man. I know myself to be bad; but I love you too well to harm a hair of your head. All the same, I intend to marry you."

"That is impossible. I am married already, and if Harold were to die—well, you know what I said."

"That was only supposing I killed him," argued Van Zwieten. "But suppose he were killed fighting, as he may easily be?"

"Then I would remain a widow for the rest of my days. I love my husband. I should always remain true to his memory. You could never be anything to me. Not until this moment have I ever been able to feel the faintest glimmer of respect for you."

"Even if that is so, I wonder that you choose to speak like that to me, situated as you are now. It is calculated to scatter the good intentions of a better man than I."

"I cannot help it. I have told you I am not in your power. I am not afraid to die. That I prove by not

shooting you as you stand there. As it is, I keep these little bullets for myself."

Van Zwieten groaned. "To think of this woman being wasted on a worthless fool like Burton!" said he.

"He is not a fool."

"You may not think so. You cannot expect me to agree. Oh, if you had only listened to me, only given me a chance, I would have been a better man!"

"I think you are a better man, or you would not have behaved as you are doing now. You are a strange mixture of good and bad."

He shrugged his shoulders. "It often happens so," he said. "Those who think to find a bad man all bad or a good man all good are invariably disappointed. I have met the best of men, and hated them for their meanness, just as I have met the worst and loved them for some delightful incongruity. We are a pie-bald lot indeed."

Then again for a few moments they went on silently. In the distance now could be seen a light, and on the wind came the barking of dogs. The murmur of the river continued all the while like the drone of the bagpipes.

"You see, I have not deceived you," he said. "There is the farm. There are women there. The men are out with their commandoes—rebels, you call them. I suppose you wonder what I am doing here on this side of the Tugela?"

"I do, considering Wilfred Burton is in the camp, and it would be very easy for him to denounce you. You are not the man to run unnecessary risks, as a rule."

"The risk I am running is for your sake. No, I won't explain myself now. If necessary, I must show a clean pair of heels. That, fortunately, I am well able to do. But here we are at the farm. That is Tant' Trana on the doorstep."

He lifted her from the horse, and she saw the stout woman whom he called Tant' Trana waiting on the door to receive them. The look she gave Brenda was by no means one of kindly welcome. Rather was it full of hostility. But she seemed to fear Van Zwieten, and she set herself to do her best to make the English lady comfortable. When he had gone out to look after his horse, Tant' Trana set the best she had in the way of food before Brenda. But the girl was utterly exhausted, and could not eat. She drank a cup of coffee, and the Boer woman watched her dourly as she drank it. Then it appeared that Tant' Trana spoke English.

"I am no child," she said. "No; I have lived long, and the dear Lord has watched over me. But never did I expect to see an Englishwoman at my table. Beloved Lord, Thy wrath is heavy upon me!"

"I am very sorry," said Brenda, considerably taken aback by this outburst. "I won't trouble you long—only till morning."

But Tant' Trana continued without heeding her. She was so fat that it took her some time to recover her breath. "The dear Lord gave this land to us—to the chosen of Israel. And you English—you seed of Satan come to take it from us!" She shook her great fist in Brenda's face. "But never fear, our burghers shall drive you into the sea. Oom Paul is our Moses.

Two sons and a husband have I fighting for the land of milk and honey. We have two thousand morgen and you would take it from us. Beloved Lord, let our Moses and his hosts smite the ungodly Amalekites!"

How long the old woman went on raving thus Brenda did not know. She began to feel sleepy: the face of Tant' Trana seemed to grow larger and more red; then it receded and her voice seemed to grow more faint—to come from far away, although the woman was talking her loudest. Brenda had just grasped the idea that her coffee had been drugged when she lost her senses. With one last effort she pulled out her little revolver. It dropped from her hand as her head fell back. The Boer woman picked it up and cursed like Deborah. Senseless and white, Brenda lay in the big chair, Tant' Trana looking on and raving the while. Then Van Zwieten entered the room. A smile of satisfaction flitted across his face.

How long she remained thus insensible Brenda knew not. She came gradually to herself. Then she wondered if she could be on board ship. There was a rocking motion, and she felt as though she were imprisoned. Then her senses grew more clear, and she awoke to the fact that she was on horseback—in the arms of Van Zwieten. He held her steadily in front of him on the saddle, and the horse was trotting steadily over the grass, and a thunderous black sky was overhead. She uttered a cry, and gave herself up for lost. Once again she felt for her revolver. Van Zwieten guessed what she was after, and laughed cruelly.

"No, it's not there, Mrs. Burton," he said. "I had

to arrange that. I'm glad, though, you've woke up. I want to have a talk with you."

"Put me down! put me down!" gasped the girl.

"Put you down?" repeated he, clasping her the tighter. "Hardly, after all the trouble I have had to get you here. That is too much to ask, dear Brenda."

"Your promise—you promised to treat me well."

"And I have done so. As I told you, I would not harm a hair of your dear head. And I have not done so, and I will not do so. I had to drug your coffee because I knew that by no other means should I be able to get you away. All's fair in love and war, you know. This is both love and war. I told you that in Durban; don't you remember?"

"Where are you taking me?"

"To the Boer lines. We have crossed the river; yes, there is a ford hard by the farmhouse. That, of course, was the reason I took you there. In another hour we shall be safe amongst my own people. Thence you will go to Pretoria, and then—and then, when the war is all over, you will marry me!"

"I will die first," she screamed, trying to struggle.

"You will not be allowed to die. The little revolver looked pretty, ah, so pretty! in your hands, but it was dangerous. I love you too well to lose you like that. And now that I have you wholly in my power, you cannot say that I am behaving badly."

"Oh, put me down, do put me down! Dear Mr. van Zwieten, don't spoil your good action in saving me on the veldt by ——"

"Saving you! Saving you!" exclaimed the Dutch-

man. "How innocent you are, child! Why, you don't think our meeting was accidental, do you? I had you brought there. I knew exactly what would happen, and my calculations were not very far out, were they?"

"You!—you!—oh, how can you tell me such a thing? I don't believe it. It is a lie."

"Gently, please, gently," said he, restraining her tenderly. She was struggling to free herself from his grasp, even, as she knew, at the risk of life and limb. "I can be cruel as well as kind. I tell you it was I who brought you on to the veldt. The Kaffir boy who attended to your horse is my servant. I knew how you rode every day, for I followed you up from Durban, and have watched you constantly. I told the boy to prepare a special bit for your horse; one that would burn his mouth after a while. Oh, that is an old trick which I learned in your virtuous England. When the little beast began to feel the burning he naturally bolted. What else would you expect him to do? I did not anticipate he would throw you, though; that was not included in my plans! The rest you know."

Again she tried to struggle free from his grasp. "For God's sake, let me down!" she cried. She felt she would go into hysterics every moment.

"That is the one thing I will not do. I have you at last, and I keep you. You are mine now, husband or no husband. Not if I can help it shall you ever see him again."

She strove to pierce the black darkness that was all around. She strained and strained her eyes, but there

was nothing. Then she thought she saw a light. But she could not be sure. On the vain chance that somebody might hear she screamed loudly once, and then again and again.

"Be quiet, I say," roared Van Zwieten, savagely. "Understand that I won't lose you—that I shoot you first, and myself too, for that matter."

He spurred his horse; they were not yet beyond the territory under British patrol. He seemed to know perfectly well where he was making for. She began to feel sick and faint with the motion and the fierce clutch of the man. The horse was galloping hard now with his double burden. She felt he could not last long at that pace. But Van Zwieten had set his teeth hard to it, and urged him on and on, speaking not a word.

"Oh, God, save me from this man!" she cried.

As though in answer to her prayer there was a terrible clap of thunder. A flare of lightning overspread the sky, and by its light she could see his face was deadly pale, and oh! so cruel. Before he could swear —for his horse shied at the crash—before even she could cry out, the rain came down with a hiss and a swirl, almost a solid mass of water. Once again her thoughts went back to that night long ago when Malet had been murdered. Was *she* about to meet death too?

Then, with an oath, he drove the spur into the animal, and, terrified, it made another bound forward. The rain lashed their faces; they were already drenched to the skin. Then came another fearful thunderclap. She felt as though her head must burst. There was a

gleam far away there in the distance—the light from some farmhouse, probably.

"Help, help!" she screamed. "Oh, Harold!—Harold!"

Van Zwieten swore loudly, but his oaths were drowned in the thunder overhead. The horse reared, snorting with terror. Then she felt the Dutchman's arms lessen their grip, and in a paroxysm of fright and despair she flung herself to the ground. She fell into a kind of morass, and she could hear Van Zwieten's cry of rage as the animal sprang forward. The next moment, half stunned and dazed as she was, she was up and running for dear life toward the light now not far distant.

In vain did Van Zwieten struggle with his terrified horse. The animal plunged and reared, and every peal of thunder increased its state of frenzy. He heard the girl shriek, and by a lightning flash he saw her tearing across toward the light. In the distance a farmhouse showed up black in the glare. Then, as once again he dug his spurs and turned his horse's head, he heard a shot. It was followed by another and another, and the next flash showed him several figures in front of the house.

Once again Brenda screamed for help. A lusty British cheer was her reply. It reached the ears of the horseman, and he knew well what it meant. He galloped off through the roar and conflict of the elements like a madman. He had lost her! For the second time she had escaped him!

Her heart bounding, she ran forward with redoubled energy, shouting ever her husband's name. There

was another shot and another flash of lightning across the sky. It seemed to her that the very heavens were open. She threw up her arms and fell against the farmhouse fence. Then she heard a voice give out some order.

It was her husband's voice!

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

BRENDA'S reasoning power was not at fault in that moment of excitement. Harold, with his small patrol party, had crossed the river. She, too, was across the river—Van Zwieten had told her that. It was Harold's voice she had heard; she could not be mistaken. It was no matter of the wish being father to the thought. It was his voice she had heard—the voice of her own husband. He was there in the farmhouse with his party.

"Thank God!" she cried, raising herself with difficulty.

Where Van Zwieten was she did not know. He could not harm her now; Harold was there to protect her. Clinging to the stones of the fence in the drenching rain, she cried his name aloud again. There was silence, then the sound of many voices and the tramp of feet.

"Who goes there?" asked a gruff, military voice.

"I—an Englishwoman—Mrs. Burton—let me in."

The gruff voice uttered an exclamation of astonishment, and there sounded the dull thud of a rifle being grounded. Immediately afterward she heard a light footstep on the veranda of the house, and her husband's voice, surprised and incredulous.

"Brenda!"

"Oh, Harold, Harold, it is I! Let me in—let me in!"

The gate in the wall was pushed open and several privates emerged. Some one carrying a lantern swung it so that the light fell on her pale and haggard face. Then, with a low cry of astonishment, her husband picked her up in his arms and carried her into the house.

"Good God! Brenda, what are you doing—how did you come here?"

She could not speak—she was sobbing on his breast. He placed her gently on the hard sofa. Then she found her voice. But she could think of nothing—say nothing. She could only rejoice in having found him.

"Oh, Harold, Harold! Thank God, I have been led to you!"

"My poor girl, you are cold and wet and exhausted. Here, drink this brandy, and I'll get something cooked for you. Don't exhaust yourself more by trying to explain. That will come after."

He had thought of her far away—safe and sound in Spearman's Camp. Even now he had some faint notion that Van Zwieten had something to do with this, though how he could have managed it he couldn't for the life of him conjecture.

She smiled lovingly at him, and submitted to be wheeled in the chair to the fire. Her habit was soaking wet, and steaming now in the heat. He knelt beside her and took her hand.

The room was of no great size. It was furnished quite roughly with a few chairs and a sofa, and a

table of unpainted deal. Pictures from the *Illustrated London News* and the *Graphic* were on the walls; there was a portrait of President Kruger, looking even more grim than usual, over the mantelpiece; from its presence she judged that the owners of the place were rebels. Outside, the rain still came down in torrents, and in a room close by she could hear the men keeping up their spirits and doing their best to make all gay within. Making her take off her soaking habit, her husband wrapped her in his military cloak. He asked no questions, for he saw that she was not in a fit state of mind to answer them. She began once or twice to try and tell him, but he would not listen.

"When you have something to eat, dear, and have got these wet things off, then I am ready to listen to all the miracles you have to tell me, for I can't conceive how you came here in this plight except by a miracle."

Then a woman—who so far belied the traditions of Boer female beauty as to be exceeding lean instead of stout—entered the room with a tray of smoking dishes. She was a kindly creature, and smiled pleasantly. She spoke nothing but low Dutch, and answered to the name of Tant' Wilhelmina. If she were at heart a rebel she showed no sign of hostility outwardly. She bustled Brenda into another room, and there supplied her with garments, dry certainly, but of the most wonderful design and color.

Clothed in these things—which were in truth the Boer woman's Sunday finery—Brenda came back to the sitting-room. Even such garments could not take away from her beauty, though they effectually con-

cealed every line of her figure. She sat down to the table and ate. Harold had gone to see his men. Then she sipped a little of the brandy and sat herself down by the fire. She felt as though she would never be warm. But after all she had undergone, this peace and rest was heavenly.

"Well, dearest," said her husband, entering quickly, "how do you feel now?"

"Better — much better. Come and sit by me, Harold, and I will tell you how I come to be here. You are just dying to know, and trying not to show it for my sake!"

He unbuckled his sword and drew a chair beside his wife. "I am very much astonished," he said, taking her hand in his, "but I have an idea before you say a word. Is it Van Zwieten?"

"Yes! I thought you might guess as much. I left the camp for a ride, and my pony bolted. Mr. van Zwieten, it appears, through the agency of a Kaffir, arranged it all by tampering with the bit. I was thrown; there I lay alone on the veldt. He came up and carried me off on his horse. When the storm burst I managed to wrench myself free and ran toward the lights in the house. But I never, never expected to find you here, dearest! It is God's mercy that has led me to you."

"I have only been here a few hours," he explained. "Warren's division had started, and we are to remain until it comes up. How strange that we should meet here. So Van Zwieten is at his tricks again! The brute! How I wish I could get a shot at him. Did he come near the house with you?"

"No. When he heard the shots he rode away; at least, I think so. But I am safe with you, Harold!"

"For the time being, Brenda. But it is just as likely as not Van Zwieten, knowing where you are, will return with a Boer force and try to take the house. This is the enemy's country, and they have not yet retired before the advance. I expect the division about dawn; but there will be time for Van Zwieten to attack before then."

"Harold! promise to shoot me before I fall into his hands."

The perspiration broke out on the young man's forehead. "If the worst comes, Brenda, I will," he said solemnly, "but I hope to shoot him. Of course, he may not bring any Boers up after all. They must know of Warren's advance, and I dare say they'll be afraid to linger outside their entrenchments. How did Van Zwieten find you on the veldt?"

"He watched the camp and followed me. Oh Harold, the whole thing was a scheme of his own to get possession of me. When I escaped he was taking me to the Boer camp; and he intended to send me to Pretoria."

"To marry you, I suppose, after I was shot! How did he treat you, Brenda?"

Mrs. Burton met her husband's gaze fearlessly. "With all courtesy," she said. "If I had been his sister he could not have treated me better. And I had my revolver, you know, until he took it from me."

"The scoundrel! I am glad you were well treated. I have to thank him for so much consideration. But if he had not ——" Harold clenched his fist.

"I would have killed myself!" said his wife, with equal fierceness. "You can trust me, Harold. You don't suppose anything—anything, even torture, could change me?"

"No, dear; I know you are the bravest little woman in the world. I have the utmost faith in you. I should be a cur if I had not. Tell me more about this brute's plotting."

This she did, omitting no detail from the time when Van Zwieten had picked her up on the veldt to the time of her meeting with him, her husband. He ground his teeth as he listened; yet he was relieved to find things were no worse. In spite of the Dutchman's villainy, he was inclined to think better of him than he had hitherto done. Dishonorable as he was, he had at least treated a defenceless woman with respect. At the conclusion of the story he kissed her again for her bravery.

"Dearest, you have been splendid! I am a lucky fellow to have so plucky a little soul for my wife. Curse the man! I long for the moment when I shall be face to face with him. He deserves nothing better than a bullet; and he'll get it if I can shoot straight."

"No, don't shoot him," said Brenda; "he behaved well to me. He is a spy and a scoundrel, but he is not a brute. And, Harold, I really believe he loves me truly!"

"Who would not love you, my own?" said her husband, tenderly. "Yes, I can see he loves you. It is the best feeling in his black heart. All the same, I wish he would transfer this chivalrous affection to some other quarter and leave you alone."

"I am afraid he will never leave me alone until he dies!"

"Then he must die!" cried her husband, fiercely. "I shall protect you from these insults at any cost. Curse him, I wish I had shot him at Chippingholt when he accused me of murdering Malet. But we will talk of this another time, Brenda. You are worn out. Lie down on the sofa, dear, and try to sleep. Let me put my cloak over you."

"But you, Harold?"

"I must keep my eyes about me. I have an idea that Van Zwieten will bring his Boers up before dawn."

"If you think so, would it not be better to retreat toward the advancing column?"

"No. I have my orders to stay here, though, of course, no attack was anticipated. Here I'll stay, Brenda, and do my duty. I have a dozen men, and in this house I dare say we can hold out until our advance guard arrives. I am not afraid for myself, but for you."

"Dearest, do not be afraid for me. I would rather be here than in the camp. If we are to die, we die together."

"I won't die; neither shall you. We'll baffle Van Zwieten yet! So far, fortune has been on our side. Now go to sleep. I must attend to my duty!"

Brenda obeyed. She was worn out with emotion and fatigue; so much so that she could not sleep. She lay flat on her back on the hard sofa, staring at the whitewashed ceiling, on which the flicker of the dying lamp made the shadows dance. Harold had taken

away the lamp in case the steady light should attract attention from the outside. If Van Zwieten was about it was not improbable that he would fire where he saw a light. Brenda hoped with all her soul that he would not return. She could not bear to think that she had been the means of bringing Harold and his men into peril. But she sadly feared that, knowing where she was, the Dutchman would bring up some of the enemy, who were not far away, and would try to capture the farmhouse before the advance column came up. Full of the thought of it, worn out by anxiety and excited by the novelty of the situation, she could not close her eyes, but tossed and turned on her hard couch, longing for the daylight. The suspense was almost unbearable.

The hours passed slowly. Now and then Harold would come in to give her a word of comfort; and she always replied with a bright smile and a cheerful word.

The men in the other parts of the house relieved each other in watching. Captain Burton had honestly told them what they might expect. There was nothing to be gained in minimizing matters. Each man—there were a dozen of them—had his rifle and revolver with a few rounds of cartridges. It was obvious they could not hold the place against any prolonged attack on account of their shortness of ammunition. But if the Boers did not commence operations until dawn, as it was improbable they would do, they on the other hand, would not have much time. Warren's column was on the march, and would be there betimes in the morning, and then the enemy would be forced to fall

back on their entrenchments among the mountains unless they chose to run the risk of capture by the superior force. On the whole, Harold felt sanguine that he and his men would come out of it all right. And there was always the chance that Van Zwieten might not bring up his force, or that he might make over-elaborate preparation, and thus delay the attack if he did. At worst, he could rely upon the arrival of the column very shortly.

He determined that, when all was safe, he would send Brenda back to the camp. That done, he could march forward to the relief of Ladysmith with a light heart. Twice Brenda had escaped this man. She should do so a third time.

Toward dawn the rain ceased and the thunder-clouds rolled away, leaving a clear and starry sky. There was no moon, but the surrounding objects were faintly outlined in a kind of luminous twilight. The animals about the house commenced to wake and sniff the morning air. Burton went on to the veranda and looked out on the wild waste veldt, uncanny in the cold light of early dawn. He could discern no sign of an approaching enemy. Nevertheless, he felt anything but easy in his mind, and determined on a definite course of action. If Van Zwieten did come he would find the bird he wanted to capture flown beyond his reach. Captain Burton returned to the sitting-room and woke Brenda from the uneasy slumber into which she had fallen.

"Dearest!" he said, sitting down and drawing her to him, "I have a presentiment that Van Zwieten will attack this house, and I want to put you beyond his

reach. I will send you forward with one of my men. There is a horse here which I can get from the Boer woman. He will take you to the advancing column and you will be sent back safely to the camp."

But she flatly refused to do this. "I won't leave you here to be shot. I know you can't come yourself, and I won't go without you. I suppose we could not all leave the place?"

"No. I have my orders to remain here until the column comes up. I can't disobey, Brenda. You must go."

"No, no, don't send me away! I will—I will—"

There was a shout outside and Harold sprang to his feet. "I hope to God it is not too late!" he cried, and hurried out.

But it was too late. Across the veldt a large body of Boers were riding. The east was saffron color, and everything for a considerable distance could be seen clearly. The sentry who had shouted pointed out the advancing column to his captain. And Harold went round the house and gave orders to bolt and bar all the windows. Then he returned to his wife and insisted that she should leave with one of the men.

"I must send a messenger back to tell them we are being attacked, and hurry them up. You must go, Brenda."

"No, no! A thousand times no!"

"God help us then," he groaned, and went off to despatch his messenger. The enemy was riding at a canter across the grass. He took one of his lancers

round by the back where the horses were picketed, and told him to ride with all speed to the advancing column, and report the danger.

The man took his horse and stole quietly away, taking a wide detour to avoid the lynx eyes of the Boers. So he was away and out of sight before they reached the farmhouse by the front. Brenda could see them coming, could see Van Zwieten leading—she knew him by his golden beard. She ran to change her things, and by the time the Boers had dismounted near the fence running round the house, she was back in her riding-habit. She got a revolver from her husband, and by his orders remained in the sitting-room as the safest place. Then he kissed her fondly and went out. His men, posted at doors and windows, were all on the alert—coolly courageous, as the British soldier always is in time of peril. For the rest they were in God's hands.

The yellow in the east changed to a fiery red, and all the earth was bathed in roseate hues. From the veranda Captain Burton could see the wide veldt rolling in grassy waves to the foot of the distant mountains, and a gleam of the winding river, crimson in the glare. The enemy were grouped some distance away from the fence, and he went out with two men to ask their intentions. Of course he knew too well what they were, but even in war there is a certain etiquette to be observed. After a while Van Zwieten, with a white handkerchief at the end of a stick, came forward also with two men, and stopped at the fence, whence he could talk to the English officer.

"Well, you scoundrel!" Captain Burton said fiercely,

for his soul loathed this man who was trying so hard to take his wife away from him, "what do you want?"

"I want Mrs. Burton, and I want you!"

"You shall have neither—or, at best, our dead bodies."

The other man changed color. "Don't be a fool, Burton," he said. "I have a number of men here, and you must give in. Surrender, and I promise you that you shall go free."

"And my wife?"

"I can't let her go," Van Zwieten said sullenly. "I have risked too much for her sake to do that. She must come with me!"

Captain Burton stepped forward a pace, but he still kept on the veranda. His orderlies stepped forward, also stolid and courageous. "You villains," said Burton, savagely, "how dare you make such a proposal to me? If it were not for the flag you carry I would shoot you where you stand. If I were only one of your lot I should do so in spite of it! I hope to God that I shall kill you! And I will some day. You have insulted my wife for the last time, you scoundrel!"

"I never insulted Mrs. Burton, as she will tell you herself," the Dutchman said coolly. "And she will not be your wife long. I shall claim her as mine over your corpse."

"Do so if you can! But I want no more talk. Retire your men."

"Surrender to the President of the Transvaal Republic!" was the counter demand.

"I hold this house for Her Majesty the Queen. I refuse to surrender."

"Your blood be on your own head, then!" Van Zwieten turned as though to retire. Suddenly he sprang aside and flung up his hand. The Boers with him instantly had their rifles to their shoulders, and two shots rang out. Harold had just time to throw himself down, but one of his men was shot. The poor fellow flung up his arms with a cry. It had not died away before a volley came from the British soldiers within the farm; but by this time Van Zwieten and his companions had decamped and, expecting the return fire, had thrown themselves down. The larger body of Boers fired; and under cover of this the three scoundrels rolled, and afterward ran into safety. Harold sprang back through the door, whither the other soldier had preceded him. He picked up the dead man in his arms, and, with bullets pattering about him like rain, carried the body indoors. Then the door was closed and the siege began. As the first shots came ping, ping against the red stone walls, the sun uprose in a blaze of glory and all the veldt was flooded with golden splendor.

CHAPTER XXV.

BESIEGED.

THE fence round the house was made of stone, and the Boers took advantage of this as cover, whilst some of them sheltered behind the trunks of the red gums. Even then the besieged had the advantage, for they were protected by the walls of the farmhouse, and could shoot without exposing themselves. To Van Zwieten the disappointment of not having succeeded in shooting Harold in the first dastardly attack was very great. Had their leader been killed, he imagined that the soldiers would have surrendered, quite forgetting that it was not the custom of Englishmen to yield to anything but death. Now, however, there was nothing for it but to take the place before relief could arrive. By all his gods he swore that Brenda should be his.

Mrs. Burton herself remained in the sitting-room, revolver in hand. Far from being afraid, the girl, much to her own surprise, was filled with the terrible joy of battle; indeed, she was in the highest spirits. The Boers fired at the windows and wherever they saw a puff of smoke. As the bullets sang, and the smell of powder became stronger, Brenda could hardly contain her excitement. The Boer woman was on her knees in a back room praying with all her might that the accursed *rooineks* would be taken and killed. Her

husband and sons were with the armies of the Republic, and her whole heart was with her countrymen outside. How gladly, had she dared, would she have opened the door to them!

Harold ordered his men to reserve their fire. His aim was not so much to score a victory as to hold the house until help arrived. On their side the enemy were equally careful, and the fight progressed but slowly. There were thirty Boers, more or less, and of these three were already dead, while two were wounded. Of those in the house only the man shot under the white flag was dead. Van Zwieten, looking anxiously over the plain, fearing every moment to see some sign of the British advance, cursed the slowness of the affair. At last he picked some men and sent them round to try and get at the horses of the besieged; but Harold had got them under shelter in a shed, with five men in front to guard them. The Boers creeping round the corner were met by a volley which killed four and wounded two. They fled swearing, and Captain Burton rejoiced.

"Reserve your fire, men! We shall hold out after all!"

"By Heaven we will, sir!" one of the men answered. "We'll fight to the last rather than an English lady should fall into the hands of these dirty rascals. Ho! Give 'em beans, you beggars!"

And this the beggars in question proceeded to do.

Then Van Zwieten sent forward a dozen men on to the veranda with a rush. Their advance was covered by a steady fire from the rear, though not one of the besiegers showed himself. Simultaneously another

body attacked the back shed wherein the horses were housed, and in spite of the British fire succeed in effecting their entrance to the yard. Then they rushed into the shed, which was an open one. Two Englishmen fell, and there was no one to fill their places, for their comrades were fighting desperately on the veranda in front.

Van Zwieten, seeing his advantage, led the remainder of his force to the other side of the house, where there was a wide window. It opened into the room where the Boer woman was kneeling. She flung open the shutters. Van Zwieten jumped in, followed by half-a-dozen of his men, and the first those within knew of it was when they found themselves attacked in the rear. They right about faced, put their backs to the wall, and fought like men. Then, as a reward for her treachery, a stray bullet pierced the brain of the Boer woman.

Meanwhile, the men who forced entrance into the yard were steadily gaining ground. But hearing the firing within the house they turned back by the front again, in order to come to the rescue of their comrades. The party on the veranda broke through the door and hurled themselves forward. Boer after Boer fell before the British fire, for Harold had now concentrated his men—what there were left of them. Gradually he was driven back to the sitting-room. A shout of triumph from outside announced that those who had remained had succeeded in capturing the horses.

Within, the whole place was dense with smoke. Brenda, in obedience to her husband's orders, was

lying flat on the floor beside the sofa. She gave up all for lost, but determined she would not be taken alive. She was only waiting until her husband fell. In the midst of it all she could discern Van Zwieten. Rifles were useless now. It was hand to hand work. The end was near.

There, in the little room, Harold stood with three of his men beside him. The others were either dead or dying. But the Boers had got off by no means cheaply. At least twenty of them had been done for. The four Englishmen, with their backs to the wall, fought on, using revolver, muzzle and butt-end, until at last their cartridges gave out, and they threw down their weapons with a curse and surrendered. There was nothing for it. Van Zwieten gave vent to a yell of triumph. His men threw themselves on Burton. But the Englishman was too quick for them. He stepped back quickly and levelled his revolver. He had one chamber loaded.

"I have just one left," he said hoarsely; "stand up to it, Van Zwieten, for I am keeping it for you!"

"Finish him, men!" roared the Dutchman.

"No, no," cried Brenda, and before a man could move she had flung her arms around her husband and stood between him and them. "The last shot, dear, is for me!" she said.

There was a pause. They held back. Harold never flinched. His wife clung to him desperately. His face was streaming with blood from the graze of a bullet. But he was determined to make good use of that last shot.

Beside Van Zwieten stood a huge man with a white,

flowing beard. At last the Dutchman made a dash forward and attempted to take Brenda from her husband's arm.

"You are mine," he cried madly, "mine! You shall not die!"

"Coward!" hissed Burton, "take your lead like the dog you are!" He fired. But she, struggling to free herself from the Dutchman's grasp, fell heavily against his right arm and spoiled his aim. The bullet whizzed overhead. He threw down his weapon and prepared for the worst. He put her behind him. Sobbing, she fell on her knees and clasped her arms around his legs. She felt for her revolver that she might be sure of death when he died.

"Fire!" rang out from Van Zwieten. "Spare the woman, kill the man!"

Two Boers levelled. But the old man with the white beard rushed forward and struck them aside. They fell wide. "Hold!" he cried, "let no man fire!"

"Damn you, Piet Bok, what do you mean?" asked Van Zwieten, savagely.

"Ah! Piet Bok!" cried Harold, seeing a chance of life and of saving his wife, "I am your prisoner again. I yield to you."

"Fire, men!" shouted Van Zwieten. "Fire, I tell you!" He was seething with rage at the fear lest his prey was going to escape him. Then turning to the old man he said, "Piet Bok! this is my business!"

"It is the business of the Republic," retorted Piet, coolly, and at the same moment he struck down a Boer who was about to fire. "I'll shoot the first man

who disobeys my orders," he said. "Clear the room. I am in command here!"

It was done. Then they set to work to drag out the bodies of the dead and tend the wounded.

Soon Harold and his wife, Piet Bok and Van Zwieten, were left alone. For the third time the Dutchman had been baffled. The man whom of all others he would have had dead still lived.

Harold, knowing well that Piet Bok would stand his friend, said nothing for the moment, but wrapped his arms round Brenda and faced the two men. The issues of life and death were in their hands.

"Will you sit down, Englishman?" said Piet Bok. "I see you are wounded."

"A mere scratch!" replied Harold; "but my wife will sit with your permission!"

"Your wife!" echoed the Boer leader, who spoke English well enough. "You never told me she was the *rooinek's* wife!" he added, turning to Van Zwieten.

"I did not think it was necessary," growled the other; "besides, I thought that would have ceased to be by now!"

"Yes, I can well believe that!" cried Brenda, with sudden energy. "Mynheer Bok, do not believe what this man says. He tried to carry me off from my husband last night; and when I escaped to this place he brought you and your men up with the sole object of having my husband shot. He would shoot him now if he dared!"

"That he shall not do whilst I am here!" cried Piet Bok. "You are both prisoners of the Republic, and as such you shall be treated."

"Nothing of the sort!" cried Van Zwieten, mad with rage. "I demand that the man be shot and the woman be given to me!"

Piet Bok signed to Harold to remain silent. "On what grounds?"

"On the grounds that this woman was engaged to marry me with the consent of her father, and that this man has married her against her father's will."

"Is this true?" asked the Boer leader.

"No!" cried Brenda, "it is not true. At one time my father, deceived by this wicked Van Zwieten, did wish me to marry him. But when he found out his true character he consented to my marriage with Captain Burton. I never was engaged to him! I always hated him. This is my husband!" She laid her hand on Harold's shoulder. "Give me to that man and I will kill myself."

"She raves!" said Van Zwieten. "He has turned her against me."

"That is another lie," said Harold, fiercely. "You don't believe him, Piet Bok?"

"No, I don't believe him," replied the big man, quietly. "I believe the lady. My friend," he added, turning to Van Zwieten, "can you wish to marry a woman who openly declares hatred for you? Besides, she is already the wife of this English soldier, and she loves him."

The Dutchman winced. "I demand his death!" he cried.

"On what grounds?"

"He is a murderer."

"That is untrue," Brenda said quietly, "and you know it, Mr. van Zwieten."

"Oh, I wish I could meet you face to face and fight it out!" Harold said, between his teeth. "Only death will stop that cursed tongue of yours."

"A murderer!" repeated Piet Bok, looking at Captain Burton. "That is a serious matter. State your case, Van Zwieten."

Glibly enough he complied. He related the events which had taken place at Chippingholt, the death of Mr. Malet, the finding of the revolver belonging to Harold, and ended by stating his conviction that the crime had been committed by Captain Burton. "And he killed Malet because he was on our side, because he was supplying information about the accursed English to me for the use of the Republic. He——"

"It is wholly untrue, Piet Bok!" cried Harold, furious at the man's audacious mendacity. "I did not kill Malet; I did not know at that time that he was betraying his own country to Van Zwieten. This man's one idea is to get me put out of the way that he may marry my wife, who hates him; and he cares not how he achieves his desire so long as he does achieve it."

"I hate him!—oh, how I hate him!" cried Brenda. "I will kill myself rather than have anything to do with him. If my husband dies I will die too. Oh, Mynheer Bok, save me; save my husband from that man!"

"If you do not shoot the murderer," Van Zwieten said in his turn, "you are no friend to the Republic, Piet Bok!"

The big Boer turned round and cursed him for his words.

"I am a true burgher of the Transvaal," said Piet Bok, with vehemence, "and you are an outlander; one of those rats who want to creep into our corn-rick and grow fat. The whole of the war is the doing of such as you. What do you know about me in connection with my own country? Nothing. And what you say about these people is untrue. The woman hates you. You would kill her husband to marry her against her will. As to the *rooinek*, he is not the kind of man to murder. With my own eyes I saw him spare my boy, Hans. You shall harm neither of them."

"What will you do, then?" shouted Van Zwieten, furiously.

"Send them to Pretoria as prisoners. Yes; but not in your charge, mark you. You would kill them on the road. I command here, Van Zwieten. Go out, mynheer, and get your men together. The British are advancing and I have no fancy for being trapped. Go!"

"But these two!" said the other.

"I will be responsible for these two," thundered Piet Bok. "Do you want to be shot yourself? That you will be, unless you obey instantly."

Very unwillingly Van Zwieten turned and went, and they heard his voice outside shouting to his men. Brenda sprang forward and kissed Bok's hand. "Thank you, mynheer, for your goodness. God bless you!"

"Piet Bok, you are a brick!" cried Harold, enthusiastically; "and since it seems my fate to be a prisoner,

I would rather be your prisoner than any one else's."

"You spared my boy's life, man," was the answer, "and I am not ungrateful. I know Van Zwieten is a bad man, but he is powerful with our Oom Paul. He will make trouble when you are sent to Pretoria." The old man bent forward and whispered, "If I can help you to escape I will. Hush! not a word, my children. I hate Van Zwieten. He is one of those who have ruined our country. Come, now we must go."

Considerably cheered by the friendly spirit displayed by the old man, Brenda and her husband went out on to the veranda. Here they found the Boers—they had buried their dead and had secured the other prisoners—ready to start. The English dead were left unburied, much to Harold's wrath, and he begged Bok to let him and his surviving fellows bury them before leaving. But the permission was refused.

"We must get away; there is not time. Your column will be upon us immediately, I know. Mount, Englishmen. And you, lady—see, we have found a saddle for you. Ah! you cannot say we burghers are not civilized. No!"

There was no help for it. Brenda mounted, and found the saddle comfortable enough. As it afterward transpired, Van Zwieten had brought it on a spare horse, so sure had he been of capturing Brenda. How he had managed to procure it in the Boer entrenchments it was impossible to say, but there it was, and Brenda on it now, but not—as the Dutchman had no doubt fondly pictured to himself—*his* captive.

With an expression black as thunder he was riding at the head of the troop. Piet Bok remained in the rear between Brenda and her husband. As they left the house, Harold looked in vain for any sign of General Warren's division.

Prisoners they were, and prisoners they seemed likely to remain, with every probability of being sent on to Pretoria, where they would be at the mercy of the intrigues of Van Zwieten once again. But Piet Bok saw the heavy glower of the Dutchman, and had his own views as to the reason for it.

"You expected your column to come up?" he said in a low tone; "so did we. Our spies have kept us correctly informed. But it seems there is some delay in crossing the Tugela."

"Are you disputing the passage?"

"No, we are not. We intend to offer no resistance to your reaching the mountains."

"Why? Surely you should dispute the river passage."

"No! We are about to—never mind. We know what we are doing. Your men are very brave—oh, yes; but your generals—ah, well! the dear Lord has shown them what they should do—for the benefit of the burghers."

Not another word would Piet Bok say; but Captain Burton gathered from his looks and speech that the division was being led into a trap. The Boers were past masters in the art of ensnaring their enemies; and on this occasion they were quite capable of entrapping the whole of Buller's army amongst the mountains. If Harold had only been alone he would have made a

dash for freedom and hastened to warn his commanding officer. But as he was placed that was impossible. He could not risk his wife's safety even for that of his division. He could only comfort himself with the thought that the British generals had been rendered more wary by their late reverses, and trust that they would succeed in avoiding this especial trap.

For some hours the little troop trotted over the veldt and drew nearer to the mountains in which the Boers had their entrenchments. Hitherto Van Zwieten had kept away from Brenda, but now he ranged up beside her while Harold was in front with Piet Bok. The man looked pale, while his eyes burned like fire. Brenda shuddered as she glanced at him and turned her horse away.

"You are not safe from me yet," he said, noting the action. "And though you shrink from me now, you will come to me later. I have finished with kindly methods. Now I will be your master. Your husband shall die! yes, in spite of that old fool. And when he is dead I will marry you. Don't think you have beaten me—or ever will!"

"I am not afraid of you, though you threaten me ever so often," she replied calmly, "for I see that God is thwarting all your wicked schemes. Twice before I escaped you: this is the third time. You are strong, Mr. van Zwieten, but you are not so strong as God!"

"Bah! Why do you preach to me? I know what I am doing."

"You do not," she said steadily, "but I do. You are marching to your death. Yes, it is true. I believe

firmly that you will die in the midst of your wickedness."

"You talk like a child," said he, uneasily, for he was inclined to be superstitious, and her solemn tone of conviction made him uneasy.

"You can laugh at me if you please, but I am certain that what I say is true. You will die—die in—"

But before she could finish her dismal prophecy Van Zwieten, thoroughly dismayed by her words, had put spurs to his horse and ridden away at full speed.

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN CAPTIVITY.

After the excitement of that day and night came five days of quiet—quiet at least for Captain and Mrs. Burton, held prisoners as they were in a Boer house on the slope of a rocky hill sparsely covered with grass. It was the homestead of a sheep farm and the animals fed amongst the hills, and, when the seasons served, down on the plain. The stone house was solidly built; it was of one story, with a roof of corrugated iron, and was comfortable enough after the Dutch fashion, so that on the whole Brenda and her husband were not unpleasantly situated. Moreover they were allowed to be together—a privilege which they valued highly. Indeed, it was the sole thing which rendered this captivity tolerable.

As it happened, Piet Bok was unable to send them to Pretoria as he had wished. The Boers were now engaged with Buller's division, and were falling back to a hill called Spion Kop, a name hardly known at that time, but fated in two or three days to be spoken of all over the world. Not a burgher could be spared to escort them to the capital, but, strangely enough, a sufficient number were told off to guard the farm-house. Harold was somewhat suspicious of this arrangement—suspicious that somehow Van Zwieten had had to do with it; but he had no means of mak-

ing certain. The Dutchman had never come near them, but they feared him all the more now that he was out of sight, and fully expected some fresh trouble. As he had warned Mrs. Burton, he had not done with them yet.

Occasionally they were visited by Piet Bok, and the old man still seemed as kindly disposed as ever, but as yet he could do nothing to help them; so for five days they had to make the best of their irksome captivity. Not even a book or a paper could they find. However, putting aside the constant dread of Van Zwieten, they were not unhappy. The house stood so high that there was a splendid view of a large plain, and on the left a huddle of hills. Beyond these the fighting was going on, and the prisoners could hear the boom of the cannon and the shriek of shells. At times they could see the smoke of the battle afar off. Harold hoped that the advance of the army would bring them help at last, but the fighting was in a more westerly direction, and the hoped-for help never came.

"If we could only escape, Brenda!" he said for the hundredth time. "It is maddening to be shut up here and to listen to all that! We must make one desperate attempt to get away. You are not afraid, I know?"

"I am not afraid," replied his wife, "but we must not be rash. We have no weapons, no horses, no food. I don't see how we are to manage it."

"Nor do I, unless Piet Bok will help us. These men outside would give us no quarter if we tried to get away. They are just dying to get rid of us."

Brenda shuddered. "Harold, don't! It is terrible to think of. I feel sure all will come right in the end."

"It won't if Van Zwieten can help it."

"He will have enough to do to look after himself. Harold, that man will die!"

"How do you know? Do you mean a violent death, and that soon?"

"Yes, that is just what I do mean. My mother was a Highland woman, and had what they call second-sight. I have not got it myself, I suppose, because I am not a pure Celt. But I have enough of the seer in me to have a presentiment about that man! I feel certain that he will die by violence, and that shortly. I can't explain myself more clearly."

"One never can explain a feeling of that sort. You told this to Van Zwieten himself?"

"Yes, and I frightened him. Perhaps that is why he has not been near us."

"I should not have thought he was superstitious, Brenda; nor you either, for that matter."

"I am not, as a rule," was her reply, "but I feel that what I say is true. Van Zwieten will die!"

Harold, sturdy, stolid Englishman as he was, tried to argue her out of this idea, but he gave it up as hopeless. She had made up her mind that their enemy was a dead man, or would be dead within a few days. Strange to say, it was on that very day that he paid them his first visit. He looked as handsome and as burly as ever. Going by appearances, he had a good many years of villainy before him yet.

He came up to the veranda and saluted Mrs. Burton with a low bow of which she took no notice.

"You are surprised to see me?" he said, with his usual cool insolence.

"I cannot say that I am surprised at anything you do," was Harold's disdainful reply. "But if you have come to make the same proposition you made before, I warn you that I shall not listen to it so patiently."

The Dutchman cast a quick glance at the slender figure of the other man. "I am not afraid of you," he sneered; "you have no weapons—neither sword nor revolver."

"I can use my fists even on such a big bully as you!"

"As you please. But I don't see much chance of delivering my message until you moderate your tone."

"What is your message?" asked Brenda, speaking for the first time.

"I come to offer you freedom."

"On what conditions?"

"There are none. I love you still. If I had my way I would kill your husband and marry you. But unfortunately," said Van Zwieten, with a sneer, "I am amongst a very moral people. Piet Bok has told the Boer generals about what they are pleased to call my wickedness, and I have been informed that if I persist in my plans I may say good-bye to all advancement amongst the godly Boers. Now I am a poor man, and cannot afford to lose all I have gained. Ambition for me must be stronger than love. So, Mrs. Burton, I give you up!"

"Thank God!" cried she, clasping her hands; adding, as an afterthought, "If I could only believe you!"

"Oh, you can believe me," he said gloomily. "If I were only a rich man—rich enough to give up my position here—I would never rest until you were mine.

But the choice lies now between you and my position. I choose to lose you. From this moment you need have no fear of me. You can go with your husband where you will. You do not love me—I know it now—but him you do love—unworthy though he is——"

"That is a lie!" Captain Burton cried, starting up.

"Hush, Harold! Is it worth while arguing about? Let him go on. Well, Mr. van Zwieten, you have come to tell us this. What else?"

"I have come to offer you my assistance to escape."

"Oh! That is what I hardly expected to hear you say. And you must pardon me if I don't believe you."

"As you please," he said again. "But you can escape to-night if you will. The men here now I shall take away with me shortly. Two horses will be left behind—food is in the house; and here are a couple of revolvers—one for you and one for Burton."

They took the weapons in silence. Could this be Van Zwieten? They did not know him in this new *rôle* of self-abnegation, and the suspicions of both husband and wife were thoroughly aroused. But the revolvers were good ones, and they were loaded. Could it be that he spoke truly and that he was anxious now to retrieve his past, to give up his plotting and spying and to live a virtuous life amongst the too-moral Boers, who had indeed, perhaps, forced him to do this thing?

Still Brenda looked doubtfully at him, for compulsory righteousness was somewhat hard to credit.

"I see you don't believe me," he said, after a pause. "Well, perhaps you are right. It is rather late in the

day for me to turn saint. But you may be sure I should not do this unless I had some very strong inducement. If you are taken to Pretoria you will only remain to vex my eyes, and I want to get you out of sight. That is my reason for giving you your freedom. To-night I will send a messenger who will guide you to the British outposts. They are not so far off as you think. Buller has advanced almost to Spion Kop, and he has taken several of our positions. If he gets Spion Kop—and I understood Warren intends to capture it if he can—he will have the key to our position and will march on to Ladysmith. But" —he shrugged his shoulders—"there is many a slip, you know. Well, I will go in and get my men. Will you follow my messenger?"

"I can't say yet," Captain Burton said bluntly. "You speak fair enough, but this may be a trick for all I know."

"How should I benefit by a trick?" Van Zwieten asked. "If I wanted to kill you I could do it now, and no one would be the wiser. The Boers here would shoot you with pleasure. But if I killed you and took Mrs. Burton, why, then, good-bye to my chance of becoming President of the Confederate States of South Africa. No, I will let you go; it suits me better. Love, as I said, must yield to ambition. But if you do not believe me, stay here. My messenger shall come at eight o'clock to-night. Follow him or not as you please. Good-bye, Mrs. Burton. You little know what it is to me to give you up; but you must say I afford you every chance of being happy with your husband.'

Brenda looked at him. She began to think he was acting in good faith after all.

"I am not ungrateful," she said gently. "We will follow your messenger. Good-bye," and she held out her hand to him.

Van Zwieten bent over it and kissed it. Then he drew himself up, looked at Harold steadfastly and turned away in silence.

"Do you believe in him?" asked Brenda after a pause.

"I don't know. Upon my soul, I don't know. He is such a scoundrel. I wonder you could let him kiss your hand, Brenda!"

"Craft must be met by craft," she replied in a whisper. "You silly boy, you don't mean to say you are jealous of that? Can't you see that I wanted to disarm his suspicions so that we might get away safely?"

"Then you don't believe in him?"

"No; he has some scheme in his head. Hush, it's not safe to talk about it now—when he's gone. Meanwhile, let him think we accept his offer."

It would really seem as though Van Zwieten were acting straightforwardly for the first time in his life. The Boers who had been guarding the place got their rifles, saddled the horses, and, headed by Van Zwieten, took themselves off down the mountain-side, and were shortly afterward to be seen riding across the veldt in a northerly direction. Captain Burton, still suspicious, could not believe in his good fortune. With Brenda he proceeded to explore the house. It was empty. They searched the orchard, the sheep kraals, the Kaffir

huts—in fact, the whole domain, but they could find no trace of a single soul. No weapons had been left, but they had the revolvers. In the stable were two horses already saddled. Harold pointed this out to his wife.

"Ready, you see, for the journey!" said he. "Van Zwieten is evidently very sure that we shall accept his offer."

"Well, we'll not disappoint him so far as the horses are concerned," replied Brenda; "but as to waiting for his messenger, I don't think we'll do that."

"Why, Brenda, what do you mean? We don't know an inch of the country."

"Probably this messenger of Van Zwieten's will know it rather too well for our liking. I don't trust the arrangement in the least. Believe me, dear, he will only lead us into some trap and we shall be prisoners again."

"I don't see that Van Zwieten need have given himself the trouble to do that—we were his prisoners already."

"I can't see through it at present either. But, nevertheless, I'm sure there's something at the back of his ostensible generosity."

Captain Burton was at a loss how to interpret it. On the whole, he was inclined to trust to his wife's instinct. He had no sort of premise on which to argue against it.

So they had something to eat and decided to leave at sundown. Beyond the hills they knew the British were engaging the enemy, so if they made due west they had every hope of coming up with the outposts

of the advancing column. There was, of course, always the chance that they might not get even so far safely, but that they preferred to risk rather than trust in Mr. van Zwieten.

Their horses were wiry little animals enough, and, if put to it, could show a very pretty pace. They fed and watered them now preparatory to their start. On the whole they were sanguine.

Then came a surprise. As they were making their own meal they heard from outside a voice hailing them in English. Harold rushed to the door and returned shortly with Piet Bok. The old man looked anxious, and hurried forward to shake Brenda by the hand.

"Thank the dear Lord you are safe," he said with emotion. "I feared it might be otherwise—that you had fallen into that man's snare."

"Then it was a snare!" cried Brenda, at this confirmation of her own feelings. "Tell us, Mynheer Bok, what was his plan?"

"Ach! is it not to tell it you and save you from it I am here?" He rubbed his hands. "I will show Van Zwieten that others can be slim as he. Beloved Lord, he is the seed of Satan, that man."

"He took away the guards, but he has left us the two revolvers and a couple of mounts all ready saddled."

"Quite so; and he is to send a messenger soon, is he not, to lead you to the British camp?"

"Yes, yes."

"Believe him not. That messenger will not lead you to your camp, but to an ambuscade of Boers

headed by Van Zwieten himself. Then your husband here will be shot and you will be carried off."

"The scoundrel! The double-dyed villain! But why all this, mynheer? We were in his power already."

"No, you were not. You must understand that I have power with the burghers; yes, and I told them your story, and they were amazed at the wickedness of this man, and he was told to go out from amongst us lest the dear Lord should send evil on the host. Then he said he would desist from his wicked schemes and send you on to Pretoria to be dealt with by the President. But I overheard his conversation with the messenger whom he intends to send to you, and I know his plan. You are to be carried off, as I have told you, and in durance vile kept until the war is over. Your husband will be shot, probably by Van Zwieten himself. But of all this he will say not a word to the burghers, and thus he will maintain his place amongst them. You see why he does not act openly?"

"I see," said Brenda, her color rising. "Now what are we to do?"

"Come with me at once," said Piet Bok. "I will lead you by another route to your outposts, and so shall we thwart this son of the pit. But you must come at once, there is not a moment to lose."

"But the messenger?"

"Of course we do not wait for him. It would mean death to you or to him."

"Right you are, then; let's get off straight away. It's getting dark already."

"Ach, yes! that is well. Come along, then."

Their trust in the old man was implicit. He had always proved a friend hitherto. The sun was setting in floods of gold over the mountain-tops as they rode down the path which descended to the veldt. Heavy rains had rendered the ground sodden. Piet Bok headed for a point in the hills where he said there was a pass other than the one in which Van Zwieten was waiting. Unluckily, as they started across the veldt, they saw a horseman coming toward them at full speed.

"The messenger!" cried Brenda. "What are we to do now, mynheer?"

The old man unslung his gun. "Kill him," he said quietly, "else he will ride on and tell Van Zwieten. If he sees me with you he will guess the truth. It is well known in laager that I am the enemy of Van Zwieten."

"Must he really be killed?" asked Brenda, with a shudder. It was terrible to her that this man should be shot in cold blood.

"It is his life or mine, dear," said her husband, pulling out his revolver to be ready if Piet Bok should fail.

But the approaching Boer was not going to trust himself at close quarters. He circled round them and held out a white flag in token of friendship. Harold laughed grimly as he recognized the old trick. Piet Bok sighted, and fired. But the fellow flung himself flat down on his horse's neck and the shot missed him.

He rode off with a defiant whoop. A big Dutch

oath escaped from the lips of Piet Bok, and he caught Brenda's horse by the bridle.

"We must ride for it," he said. "The man recognized me, and you too. He will hasten back to Van Zwieten, and they will be after us in no time. We must make for the hills."

"How can I thank you, Bok?" said Harold, gratefully.

"Almighty, that is right! you spared my boy Hans."

By this time the messenger was a mere speck on the horizon. He was riding like the wind to take this news to his chief.

The three fugitives made a straight line for the pass, urging their horses to their best. The sun had dropped behind the mountains and the shadows were gathering fast on the veldt. For several hours they tore on until they reached the mouth of the pass. There they pulled up to give themselves and their animals breath.

"I think we can count ourselves safe now," said Piet Bok, wiping his brow. "But we must push on through the pass. At the other side let us hope we shall come up with your men."

The track was narrow and winding and full of mud, which fouled the horses and made the climbing doubly hard. It was quite dark there, but Piet knew every inch of the path, and rode on ahead fearless and confident. In about an hour they emerged. There were the lights of the British camp twinkling a mile and a half away.

As they commenced the descent they heard a shot ring out, and Brenda gave a cry of dismay. Piet Bok had fallen from his saddle.

"Ride, ride for your lives!" cried the old man. "He has come round by the other pass."

And so it was. Van Zwieten, instead of following at their rear, had pushed through the other pass and had cut them off. But he had made one mistake. He had allowed them to get out of the pass on to the higher ground instead of cutting them off from the camp. As shot followed shot, Harold caught Brenda's horse by the bridle. Headlong they tore down toward the plain.

The light, or rather the dark, was all against the pursuers. They gave up firing and made to overtake them. But the sound of the muskets had already been heard in the camp, and they could hear the bugles ringing out. Whether the brave old Boer who had saved them was dead or not they did not know. It was beyond their power to aid him. They urged their horses on and on, for in their speed lay the only hope of escape.

"Courage, Brenda!" cried Harold. "Stick to it; they've heard the firing in camp."

"I will, dear—I will."

Then her husband looked round, and an exclamation of mingled relief and triumph came from him. They had given up the chase.

"They've had enough of it, hurrah!" he cried.

They were now within a short distance of the camp, and could hear the commands being given consequent on what evidently had been taken for the commencement of a surprise on the part of the Boers. Those behind them had turned and fled now in the opposite direction—all of them save Van Zwieten.

He stood up and fired twice. But his shot fell wide. Then Harold turned and tried what his revolver would do at that range. Van Zwieten's arm fell useless. Then he galloped off, none too soon, for a squadron of mounted infantry came on the scene just at the moment.

"What's all this?" shouted the captain in command.

"We have escaped!" shouted Harold—"Burton and Mrs. Burton."

"What, is it you, old man?" cried a friendly voice—a voice they knew well.

For the fourth time Brenda had escaped her enemy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEMESIS.

HAVING no ambition toward enacting the *rôle* of heroine of an Adelphi melodrama, Brenda was beginning to weary of this game of hide-and-seek. However, she was safe for the time being, as even the redoubtable Van Zwieten could hardly be expected to take her from the midst of the British army. Harold reported the mishap which had led to the loss of his men, and afterward rejoined his company. He wished his wife to go back to Spearman's Camp; but she begged so hard to remain that at last he consented. Permission was obtained from the authorities, and Brenda betook herself to her old task of nursing the wounded. She related to her friend the doctor as much of her adventures as she could without trenching too closely on her private affairs; and great surprise was expressed at her perils and her lucky escape. But to Wilfred, who came to see her and his brother as soon as he heard of their rescue, she related everything in detail.

"By Jove! what a scoundrel that fellow is!" said that young man. "I wonder when he intends to leave you alone."

"Never, I fear," replied Brenda. "Unless he is killed I shall never be safe from him."

"I'll shoot him myself if I get a chance. He is a danger to society—it must be some one's business to

put him out of the way. You have had a bad time, Brenda; but I don't think you need fear the man any more."

"What makes you say that?"

"I have an idea that he has come to the end of his tether."

"So have I," she said. "And I told him so. But, Wilfred, tell me about my father?"

"He has gone back to Durban, as you know, to see the authorities about your disappearance. He thinks you have been taken prisoner by the Boers, and that you are at Pretoria by now. He is going to try and get you exchanged."

"There is no need for that, thank God!" said Brenda, cheerfully. "I must let him know at once."

"That will be difficult unless you send a message from Ladysmith."

"When do you think we shall be there?"

"If the luck holds good, in a couple of days. We have taken most of the Boer positions; now Warren intends to try for Spion Kop to-night. If he captures it, we shall hold the key to the Boer position."

"Ah, you see Wilfred, your forebodings are all wrong."

"We are yet in the wood, not out of it," replied he, significantly. "However, I will give Buller and Warren all praise. They have done well. All the same, I still condemn this plan of campaign. Only a miracle can render it successful."

"Well, we shall see what happens when Spion Kop is taken. Do try and look on the bright side of things, Wilfred."

But the young man departed, still shaking his head. There was no doubt that he was very depressing company. His face wore a look of settled gloom most painful to behold; and he was always prognosticating calamity in the face of the most promising operations. At the same time he invariably refrained from pessimism in his letters to his newspaper, which were usually cheerful and full of devoted praise of the behavior of both troops and officers.

It was anxious work waiting in the hospital while Harold was in the field. But Brenda had not much time for thought. She was nursing the wounded with all her heart and soul, and was an angel of light amongst the weary, wounded soldiers. The doctor called her his right hand, as well he might. She deprived herself of rest and food to be by her patients. Only when compelled to, did she lie down; and then it was in her clothes, ready to be up and doing at the call of duty. Her best qualities came out in this most arduous work.

The grand attack on Spion Kop was to be made at night, in order to effect a surprise. All day long the operations went on in the field. Toward sunset Harold's company had to dislodge a number of Boers who had entrenched themselves on the slope of the mountain. The position was taken and the enemy fell back; but not without considerable loss of life on both sides. Amongst the wounded was Harold, who was shot through the lung. It was dark when the news was brought into the camp, and the ambulance bearers started under a rising moon for this miniature battlefield.

Quite unaware of her husband's mishap, Brenda was busy attending a dying man. But he was beyond her aid, and died within a very short time of his being brought in. She was closing his eyes with a sigh at the horrors of war when one of the doctors told her that she was wanted. With a presentiment of bad news she went out and found Wilfred waiting to speak to her. He was greatly agitated and took her hand as if to give her courage.

"Brenda, I have bad news for you!"

"It is Harold!" she cried, pale to the lips.

"Yes, it is Harold. I have only just heard."

"He is dead?"

"No. I hope not—I don't know; but he fell while leading the attack on one of the small kopjes. They are just going out to bring in the wounded. I thought——"

"Yes, I'll come," said Brenda, anticipating his speech. "Is it far?"

"No, not very. Make haste. God grant we may find him alive!"

She needed no second bidding, but hastily gathered together some medical comforts, wrapped herself in a cloak and came out. In silence they walked toward the fatal spot which had been pointed out to Wilfred by a private who had seen Harold fall. She did not weep. Her emotion was too deep for tears. The moment which she had been dreading all these months had arrived—unexpectedly, as all such moments do. Now she felt that the actual event was not so terrible as the expectation had been. There was a chance that he might be alive. He was wiry, healthy, clean-

blooded and clean living, and the Mauser bullets, as Brenda had seen, inflicted a clean wound. Full of silent prayer she walked on. Had she heard of this in England she would have been distracted; but somehow, since she was on the spot and would soon be with him, it did not seem quite so terrible. At all events he had fallen in the forefront of battle, doing his work, and not by the treachery of Van Zwieten. If he died he could not die more gloriously. There was comfort in that thought.

"I saw Van Zwieten to-day," said Wilfred, suddenly.

"You did? Where? When?" asked Brenda, wondering if after all the scoundrel could have had anything to do with this mishap to her husband.

"On the lower slopes. I was looking through my field-glass and saw him quite plainly riding about on a big black horse. I recognized him by his long golden beard. I am certain it was he; that was why I wanted you to come with me to see after Harold."

"I don't understand ——"

"Because as Van Zwieten is about the place he is bound to hear that Harold has been shot. He has spies everywhere; and from one of our prisoners I heard that he had described Harold's appearance to several Boer sharp-shooters, that the poor chap might be picked off."

"Do you know the prisoner's name?"

"Yes; and he's a fine old fellow who did good service to you—Piet Bok!"

"Then he was not killed at the time we escaped?"

"No, only touched on the right arm. He was taken

prisoner this morning. I would have come and told you, but I couldn't get away. I saw him by chance, and he recognized me from my resemblance to Harold. I told him he was wrong and then he informed me of Van Zwieten's new villainy. By this time the man who picked off Harold has, no doubt, told Van Zwieten, and has received his reward. And that scoundrel will probably come down to see if the news is true."

"What?" shrieked Brenda. "Oh, don't, Wilfred! If he finds Harold still alive he will kill him."

"That's what I thought; and that's why I got you to come with me. I feel certain that the brute will be there."

She uttered a cry of mingled terror and pain. "Oh, Wilfred, do not let us lose a moment. Harold, my darling!" She began to run.

"Come, Brenda, keep as quiet as you can. You'll need all your strength!"

A glorious moon filled the world with its pale radiance. The shadows of the mountains and kopjes were black as Indian ink in the white light. Here and there were points of fire, and in the distance a glimpse of the white tents of the camp. To the right rose the great mass of Spion Kop, with its flat table top dark and menacing. But a few hours and there would be a deadly struggle on that pinnacle. Already the generals were maturing their plans for the assault. Occasionally the boom of a gun could be heard, for the Boers had not yet desisted from firing, in spite of the lateness of the hour. Brenda paid no heed to all this. She strained her eyes toward the rising ground they

were approaching. Was he dead or alive? All her life was bound up in the answer to that question.

The Indian bearers swung along at a slow trot, and she followed closely on Wilfred's arm. He felt her shiver although the night was warm, and did his best to console her. And she never forgot his brotherly kindness at that terrible hour.

They climbed up the slope which earlier in the day had been swept by rifle fire. Now the Boers had retreated to another point of vantage, and the position was held by a small force of our men. As the ambulance party approached it was challenged and the word was given. In a few minutes the bearers were within the entrenchments.

"Glad you've come," said the officer in charge; "there are many poor fellows here who require your attention. The enemy are removing their dead now."

He addressed these remarks to the doctor, but he saluted when he saw Brenda, whom he knew. "I expected you, Mrs. Burton. Your husband is over yonder. We have made him as comfortable as possible."

"Then he is not dead?" gasped Brenda, turning faint.

"Oh, no," he said cheerily, "he is worth a dozen dead men. You'll soon pull him round. Over there."

He pointed to the left and she hurried away. Wilfred lingered behind to speak to the officer. "Have you noticed a particularly tall man with the Boers?" he asked, "a man with a golden beard?"

"Yes. He asked after Burton. It seems he was a friend of his before the war."

"Has he seen him?" asked Wilfred, turning pale, for well he knew the reason of Van Zwieten's inquiries.

"No, I think not. But he intends to look him up shortly. I think your brother will pull through, Burton," and he hurried away to attend to his duties. Wilfred stood still and meditated. He grasped his revolver. "The man has lived too long," he murmured; "I must do it!"

Then he moved toward the group round his brother. Brenda was supporting his head, and a doctor was examining the wound in the poor fellow's chest. "We must wait till we get him to the hospital," he said. "Have him put into the ambulance, Mrs. Burton."

"Has he a chance, doctor?" she asked with quivering lips.

"I can't say yet. The bullet has pierced the lung. Hope for the best."

Then he hurried away with his attendants, and Brenda was left alone with her husband and Wilfred. Harold was quite unconscious, but breathing faintly, and as she bent over him, with an agonized face, she prayed that God would spare his life. Wilfred stood beside her and looked down silently on that countenance waxen in the light of the lantern. As he stood there, as Brenda placed Harold's head on her knees, both heard a mocking voice beside them.

"Well, Mrs. Burton, you are a widow at last!"

She gave a cry of horror at the ill-omened words, and Wilfred turned with a bound to clutch Van Zwieten by the throat.

"You hound!" he cried. "You miserable dog!" and he hurled the big man to the ground.

Taken by surprise, the Dutchman had fallen; but he rose to his feet with an ugly scowl, cursing bitterly. "I'll pay you out for this!" he said menacingly. "At present my business is with Mrs. Burton."

"I refuse to speak to you," cried she. "You are a wicked man, and God will punish you."

"I rather think that it is you who have been punished," he sneered. "Your husband is dead, or pretty near it. Now it is my turn."

"He is not dead. He will live when you are lying in your grave. Leave me; you have done harm enough!"

"But he has not paid for it!" cried Wilfred, savagely.

"No, nor will he pay!" cried Van Zwieten, defiantly.

Wilfred pulled out his revolver. "I will make you pay!" he said. "You shall fight me!"

The Dutchman was no coward, but he drew back from the terrible expression on the young man's face, accentuated as it was in the strong moonlight.

"I refuse to fight with you," he said sullenly. "This matter has nothing to do with you. If I choose to marry your brother's widow, that is my business. Mind your own!"

"You shall marry no one," said Wilfred, harshly, "for I intend to kill you."

Brenda did not speak. She listened absently while the two men wrangled. Van Zwieten looked at her for a moment, then he turned his back on Wilfred.

"I will not fight you," he repeated.

The other man sprang forward and struck him on the cheek with his fist. "Will that make you fight?"

With a roar of rage Van Zwieten turned and flung himself forward. He caught the younger man in his arms like a child and threw him on the grass. Then he drew out his revolver and fired at the prostrate man. But Brenda had looked up, and seeing his intention had sprung to her feet and grasped his arm. The shot went wide, and in his rage Van Zwieten struck her—the woman he loved—struck her to the ground. And before he could recover himself sufficiently to fire a second time, he fell with a hoarse cry, shot twice through the breast by Wilfred Burton.

"Nemesis has come up with you at last," said the young man, picking up Brenda in his arms.

The sound of the shots had attracted the attention of the men near at hand. "Good God, Burton, what have you done?" cried an officer.

"Killed some vermin," was the reply. "Here, bring the ambulance along and put Burton into it."

"Wilfred!" shrieked Brenda, who had recovered her breath, "is he dead?"

"No," said Van Zwieten, faintly, "not dead—but dying—I have lost!"

No one attempted to molest Wilfred. "I can explain myself to the commanding officer," he said. "He will approve of what I have done."

By this time the other Boers had taken their departure, or there might have been trouble at this violation of the armistice. Brenda aided the men to place Harold in the ambulance, and when she had made him

comfortable, returned to the side of Wilfred, who was explaining his conduct to the officer in command. Van Zwieten heard her footstep—or he must have felt her presence near him. He opened his eyes. "I am done for," he said. "I suppose it is just, but I loved you, Brenda!"

Much as she hated him, she could not see him die there without making an effort to save him. She tried to staunch the wound, but it was impossible. The doctor had long since taken his departure. Seeing that all human aid was useless, she moistened the man's lips with brandy.

"Thank you," he said faintly. "Will you forgive me?"

"Yes, I forgive you," she whispered, "but you must ask forgiveness of God."

Van Zwieten shook his head feebly. "It is too late for that. Ask Burton to forgive me. He has punished me. He can afford to be generous."

Wilfred overheard the words. "I forgive you the ill you have done my family, but I do not forgive you for seeking the hospitality of my country and betraying it. Come, Brenda!"

"I can tell you something about that," said Van Zwieten, in a weak voice. "Come near."

Quite unsuspicious, Wilfred knelt down beside him. In an instant Van Zwieten raised his revolver and shot him through the throat. He fell back with the blood pouring from his mouth.

Van Zwieten laughed. "Quits!" he said. Then he fell back dead.

All was confusion. Brenda knelt beside her brother-

in-law, and took his head in her lap, while the others crowded round Van Zwieten's dead body. Wilfred opened his eyes, saw Brenda's eyes bending over him, and whispered, "Bend down, quick!"

She put her ear to his mouth, and heard him whisper in broken words, "In my breast-pocket—look yourself—packet—confession. I shot Malet."

"You—oh!" gasped Brenda. "Why?"

Wilfred Burton raised himself up with one last expiring effort. "For England!" he cried. "For England—God bless Eng ——" Then he too fell back a corpse. Brenda fainted.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CALM AFTER STORM

Two weeks later Mrs. Burton was in Maritzburg, by the sick-bed of her husband. As prophesied by Wilfred, the attempt to relieve Ladysmith by storming the impregnable positions of the enemy had failed. Certainly Warren had been so successful as to have seized Spion Kop, but only to abandon it on finding the position untenable. Then Buller very wisely had fallen back on his original line of defence across the Tugela; and the retreat had been conducted in a masterly fashion, without the loss of a man or a gun. Brenda and her wounded husband had gone back also to Spearman's Camp, and later on had gone on to Maritzburg. Wilfred was left in his lonely grave under the shadow of Spion Kop, where also lay the body of Van Zwieten.

Harold's wound was dangerous, but had not proved fatal. He had been invalided home by the doctors; and so soon as he might be able to travel he was to sail for England. But when that would be it was difficult to say. For some days he had hovered between life and death; but now he had turned the corner and was gradually winning his way back to life under the loving and skillful care of his wife. He was out of danger and on a fair way to recovery,

but it would be many a long day before he would be able to fight again.

In the meantime, Mr. Scarse, hearing that his daughter was safe and sound, had now returned from Durban, and was staying at the same hotel. He was thankful to know that at last she was to be spared the persecutions of Van Zwieten, whose death he openly rejoiced in. He was greatly astonished at the news that Wilfred had killed Malet, but he hardly censured him so severely as a Little Englander might have been expected to do in the circumstances. But, indeed, Mr. Scarse was by no means so virulent against his country now as he had been in the past. His visit to South Africa had opened his eyes to the other side of the question, particularly to the many failings of the Boers. He had learned from experience that England was not invariably wrong; that however she might blunder, she had usually right on her side. In fact, both as a father and a politician, Mr. Scarse was a reformed character.

Harold was terribly distressed to hear of the death of his brother. For a long time Brenda kept the news from him, fearing its effect in his weak state. But the day came when it could no longer be withheld, and she was obliged to tell him the truth.

It was a glorious tropical morning. Her father had gone out, and she was seated by her husband's bed, holding his hand in her own. His beard had grown, he was thin and haggard, but his eyes were bright and full of intelligence. He was anxious, and able now to hear all that had to be told. And she told him everything. He was amazed.

"Wilfred killed Malet!" he said, hardly believing his ears. "But he had a sprained ankle on that night. It is impossible!"

"His sprain was feigned to protect himself," replied Brenda, sadly; "it is all in his confession."

"He left a written confession?"

"Yes, he wrote everything as it happened on that night, and carried the statement about with him, to be placed in the hands of you or myself when he died. Hush, Harold, dear, you must not speak. Here is my father."

Mr. Scarse entered on tiptoe to inquire how the invalid was getting on. He brought in some fruit—always a welcome gift to the convalescent. He had heard enough to acquaint him with the subject under discussion. So busy had Brenda been in nursing her husband that she had not found time to tell the whole story to her father. Now he asked her for details, and she went over them again for his benefit.

"But why did Wilfred kill the man?" he asked.

"From sheer patriotic feeling," answered his daughter. "He found out that Mr. Malet was supplying information about our defences to Van Zwieten, and he remonstrated with him. Malet laughed at his scruples and denied his complicity. Then Wilfred searched Mr. Malet's desk and found papers which proved conclusively his treachery. Then it was he decided to kill him to save the honor of the family."

"Well," said Scarse, reflectively, "murder is a terrible crime; but if ever it is excusable, surely it is in such circumstances as these."

"So I think," chimed in Harold. "A man who betrays his country should not be allowed to live. In his place I would have acted just as Wilfred did. It was not a murder; it was well-deserved extermination."

"It is terrible, nevertheless. Read the confession, Brenda," said Mr. Scarse.

"No. I can tell you the story better. Harold must not be wearied, and the confession is long. Wilfred has stated at great length the reasons which led him to this act, and sets out a strong defence of it. He never regretted it at all events."

"Go on, Brenda, dear child. I am anxious to hear how he did it."

She glanced at Harold to see if he was listening, and began: "I need not weary you with his own defence," she said. "As I have told you, from papers in Mr. Malet's desk he found out that he was a traitor, and was supplying Van Zwieten with information concerning the plans of the Government, the number of men and guns which we could place in the field, and many other things which the Transvaal authorities wished to know. Had Kruger and his gang not known that we were wholly unprepared, they would not have dared to defy Great Britain and risk this war. Mr. Malet, it appears, is responsible for a great deal—indeed, for the whole war!"

"The scoundrel!" Harold said weakly. "I am glad, indeed, that Wilfred shot him. I would have done so myself."

"To ward off suspicions from his doings, Malet posed as an Imperialist. He saw Van Zwieten only

at intervals. It was to obtain possession of some papers from Malet that Van Zwieten came down to Chippingholt, and for that reason he extorted an invitation from you, father."

"I thought he was anxious to come," Mr. Scarse said. "Now I can see it all."

She continued: "Wilfred heard that Van Zwieten was at the cottage, and kept a sharp eye on Malet. He found out that he was to meet Van Zwieten on that night and give him some documents. He then made up his mind to kill him, to save—as I have said—the honor of the family, as well as to punish him for his wickedness in betraying his own country.

"Shortly before nine o'clock, Van Zwieten came to the Manor and entered the library by one of the French windows. It was his voice that Lady Jenny heard when she went to see if her husband was back from his walk. Indeed, it was Malet who brought Van Zwieten to the library to give him the papers. When Lady Jenny was on her way to the Rectory to see you, Harold, Wilfred escorted her. She mentioned that she had heard voices in the library, and wondered with whom her husband had been speaking. Wilfred guessed at once that the man was at his scoundrelly work, and was more than ever determined to put a stop to it. To get away from Lady Jenny without exciting her suspicion, and also to prove an *alibi* in case he shot the man, he pretended to sprain his ankle. Lady Jenny was quite unsuspicious, and went on to the Rectory alone. As you know, she never reached it, having been stopped by the storm. As soon as she was out of sight, Wilfred hastened

back to the house with the intention of confronting both men, and killing Malet if he did not take the papers back from Van Zwieten. He also entered the library by the French window, so the servants never saw him come in. He found the room empty, as Van Zwieten had gone away, and Malet with him—I suppose it was to receive further instructions. Wilfred saw the revolvers belonging to Harold on a side-table, for Mr. Malet had been using them that afternoon. He took one, found that it was loaded, and hastened after the pair. Knowing that Van Zwieten was at our cottage, he went first in that direction; but for a long time he could see neither of them. At last he caught sight of Malet in the orchards, just before the storm. He was talking with a man whom Wilfred took to be you, father."

"My brother, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Brenda. "It was Uncle Robert. He heard high words between the two and saw the struggle."

"That was when the crape scarf was torn?"

"Undoubtedly. Malet must have torn it and held it in his hand without thinking. Well, Wilfred saw Malet throw the other man to the ground just when the storm broke, and hurry away to get back to shelter in the Manor; but the storm was so violent that he took shelter instead under a tree. Wilfred crept up to him and waited, but it was so dark that he could not see him plainly enough to shoot straight, and he was, of course, unwilling to risk failure. Then a flash of lightning revealed Mr. Malet. Wilfred sprang forward and grasped him by the shoulder. He cried out. I

heard him myself. I was only a short distance away. When the darkness closed down again, Wilfred put the muzzle of the revolver close to his head and blew his brains out. Then he ran away, and in the darkness tripped over a stump. The revolver flew out of his hand, and he lost it."

"Van Zwieten found it?"

"Yes. Wilfred was a good deal troubled about it, for he knew that Harold's name was on it, and he feared lest he should on that account be accused of the murder."

"As I was, indeed," said Harold.

"Yes, dear, I know; but not officially. If, for instance, you had been arrested on the charge, then Wilfred would have come forward and have told the whole story. As it was, he kept silence."

"And what did he do after he had killed Malet?" asked Mr. Scarse.

"He went back to the place where Lady Jenny had left him, and waited for some time in case she should return. You see, to exonerate himself he thought it well to keep up the fiction of the sprained ankle. Then, as Lady Jenny did not return, he went home, and gave out that his ankle was sprained."

"But didn't the doctors find out the truth?"

"No; he took good care not to show his foot to any one. He wrapped it up in wet cloths and made a great fuss about it, but, in the excitement over the inquest, the doctor took no notice of it."

"I wonder Lady Jenny didn't find out the fraud," said Harold.

"In that case, Wilfred would have owned up to it

and confessed the whole thing. And I don't believe she would have minded much, if she had known what a traitor her husband was."

"No; I dare say she would have applauded Wilfred. She is a true patriot is Lady Jenny," said Harold, with a feeble laugh. "Besides, on account of Robert's wife, she and her husband had become estranged for many a long day. But did Van Zwieten never guess?"

"No," said Brenda, reflectively, "I don't think he did. He believed Lady Jenny herself had done it out of revenge; but he could not prove that, and, under the circumstances, lest his own affairs should come out, he thought it wiser to hold his tongue. Well, that is the story, and a very painful one it is. I am sure that Wilfred acted for the best, and did what he conceived to be his duty both to his country and his family; but it is dreadful to think he should have stained his hands with blood."

"I don't altogether agree with you, my dear," said Mr. Scarse, energetically. "If Malet had been detected in his treasonable dealings, under martial law he would have been shot openly. As it was, Wilfred executed the sentence privately. I am not one to defend murder, you know, but I cannot bring myself to look upon this as murder."

"Wilfred was insane on the subject of patriotism," said Harold. "He was hardly responsible for his actions when he shot Malet. I don't blame him. The reptile deserved his punishment; and Van Zwieten deserved his fate. Wilfred did no more than was right, and he rid the world of two scoundrels."

"You forget, Van Zwieten fired first," put in Brenda. "Wilfred only defended himself. I can't pretend I am sorry that Van Zwieten is dead, because so long as he lived he would never have ceased to persecute me. But let his evil die with him, Harold."

"So far as that goes I never want to hear his name!"

"Now you are overtaxing your strength talking, dear," said Brenda, arranging the bedclothes. "You must be quiet and try and rest."

"Yes, do," said Mr. Scarse. "I want to have a few words with Brenda."

So Harold lay back, and, after a time, fell into a sleep. His wife told off one of the nurses to stay beside him, and herself went out with her father. When they had gone a short distance he explained why he wished to speak privately with her.

"Brenda," he said, "a will was found on Van Zwieten. It seems that there is a sum of some five thousand pounds standing to his credit at one of the London banks."

"Really, father; I never thought he was so well off. Evidently spying paid. To whom has he left it?"

"To you, my dear!"

"To me?" She could hardly believe her ears. "I would not take it if I were starving. I hated the man. How could I touch his money?"

"But, Brenda, think for a moment; is it not foolish to throw it away? Five thousand pounds is a large sum."

"No, no, no!" repeated the girl, vehemently. "I will not touch it, I tell you. That money was made

out of spying and working evil against England. I am sure Harold would think as I do about it."

And so Harold did think. Later on, when she returned, she found him just awakened out of a refreshing sleep, and she told him of Van Zwieten's strange bequest. He refused at once to accept it, and commended her for having forestalled him in the decision.

"We can live on our own means, small as they are, dear; and, when the war is over, I will beat my sword into a ploughshare and come out here and turn farmer."

"That is if we are successful," said his wife smiling.

"Oh, I have no fear as to that. In a month or two there will be equal rights for white man and black from the Zambesi to the Cape. But, in any case, there'll be no more fighting for me, Brenda. I shall never be the same man again."

"Who says so?" she asked quickly.

"The doctor. He says this wound will always trouble me, and that I shall never be able to stand the English winters. Here the air is balmy and the climate mild."

"In that case we'll do just as you suggest, dearest. There is nothing to keep us in England. My father is wrapped up in his politics, and my aunt and uncle care only for themselves. Yes, you are right, as you always are, Harold. When the war is over we will settle here."

"We shall never think less of dear old England because we are exiles, eh, Brenda?"

"Exiles! We shall not be exiles here. This is part of the British Empire. Wherever the map is colored red there is England. Harold, dear, do you know, I cannot get poor Wilfred out of my thoughts. In his own way he was a true hero. He gave his life for his country."

"Yes, Brenda, I agree, just as much as many another man is doing here at this moment. I cannot help feeling relieved that the mystery of Malet's death is cleared up, and I am not ashamed now that I know it was my brother who fired the shot. May such justice ever be done to traitors!"

She knelt beside the bed and took his hands soothingly in her own. "Don't talk any more about these things, dearest. They excite you. I shouldn't have mentioned it. Let the past lie buried. All I know, and all I care for, is that you are alive, and that I have you wholly to myself. We will never be parted, Harold. We may be poor in the world's goods, but we are rich indeed in love."

"And that is the best of all riches, dearest."

"Amen," she said and kissed her husband tenderly.

THE END.

Hagar of the Pawn-Shop

By FERGUS HUME,

***296** pages, size 7½x5, Cloth, 3 stampings, $1.00.*

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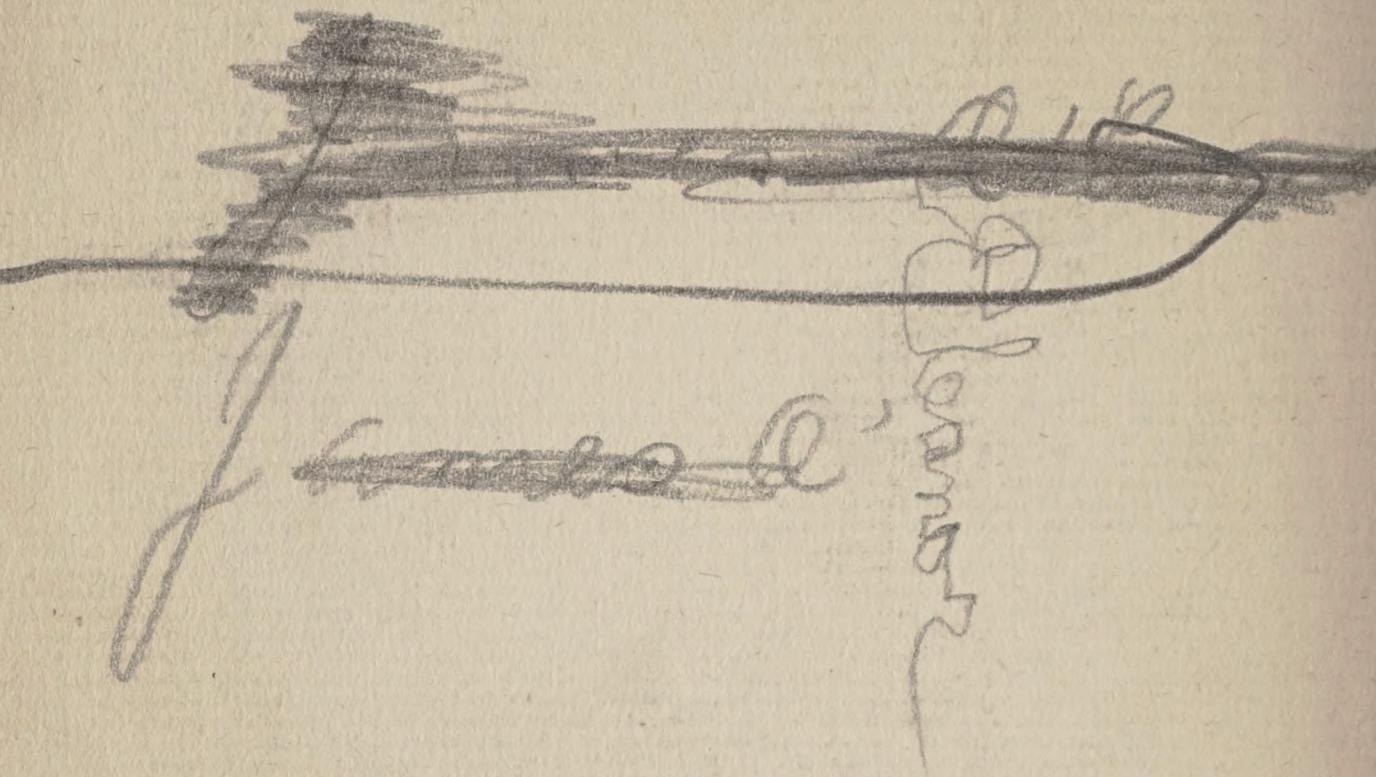

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